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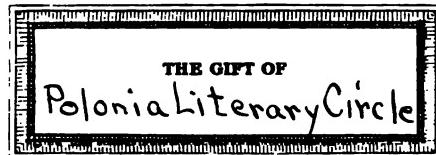
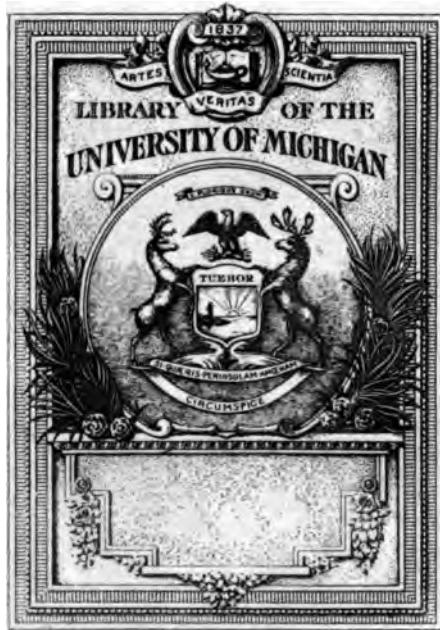
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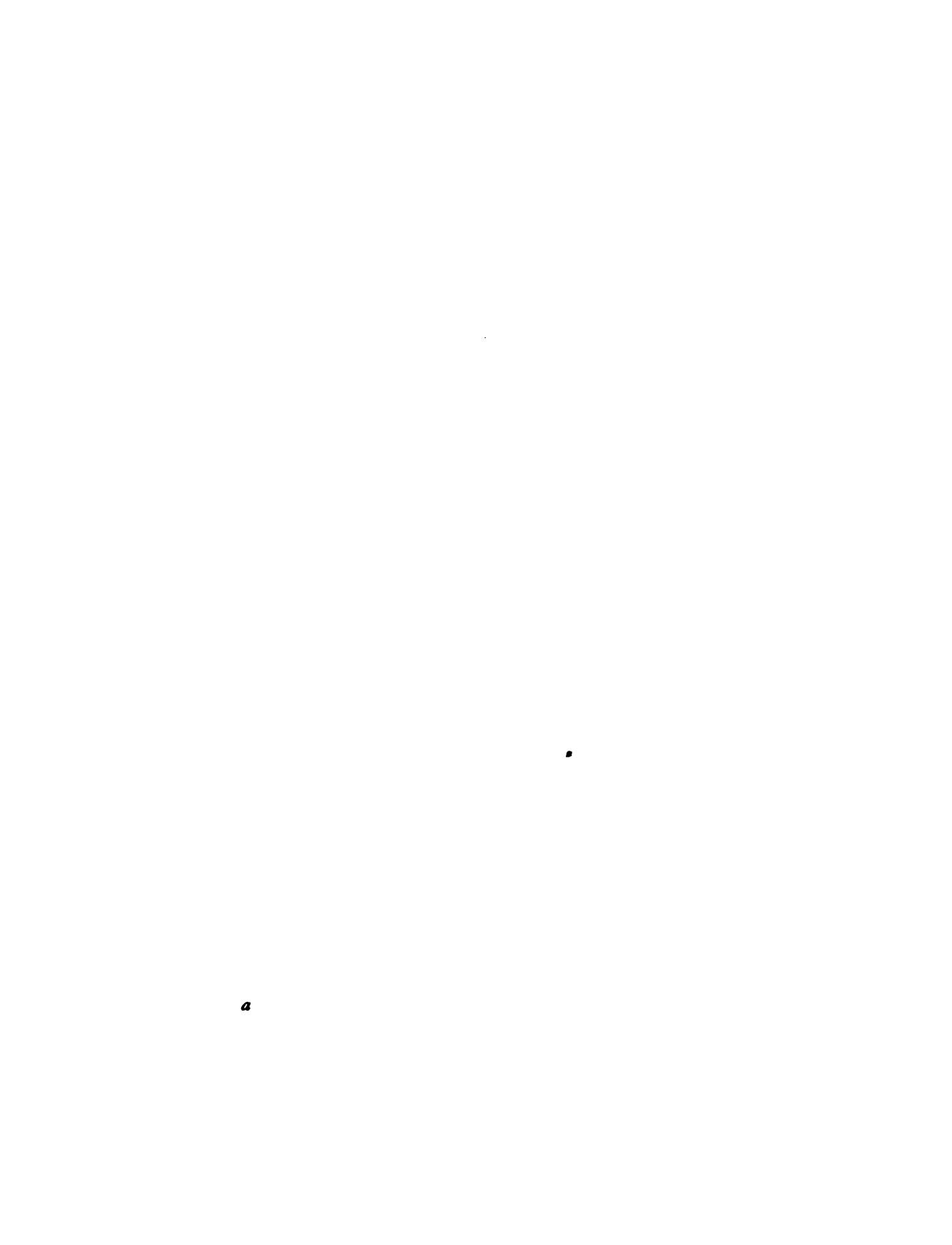
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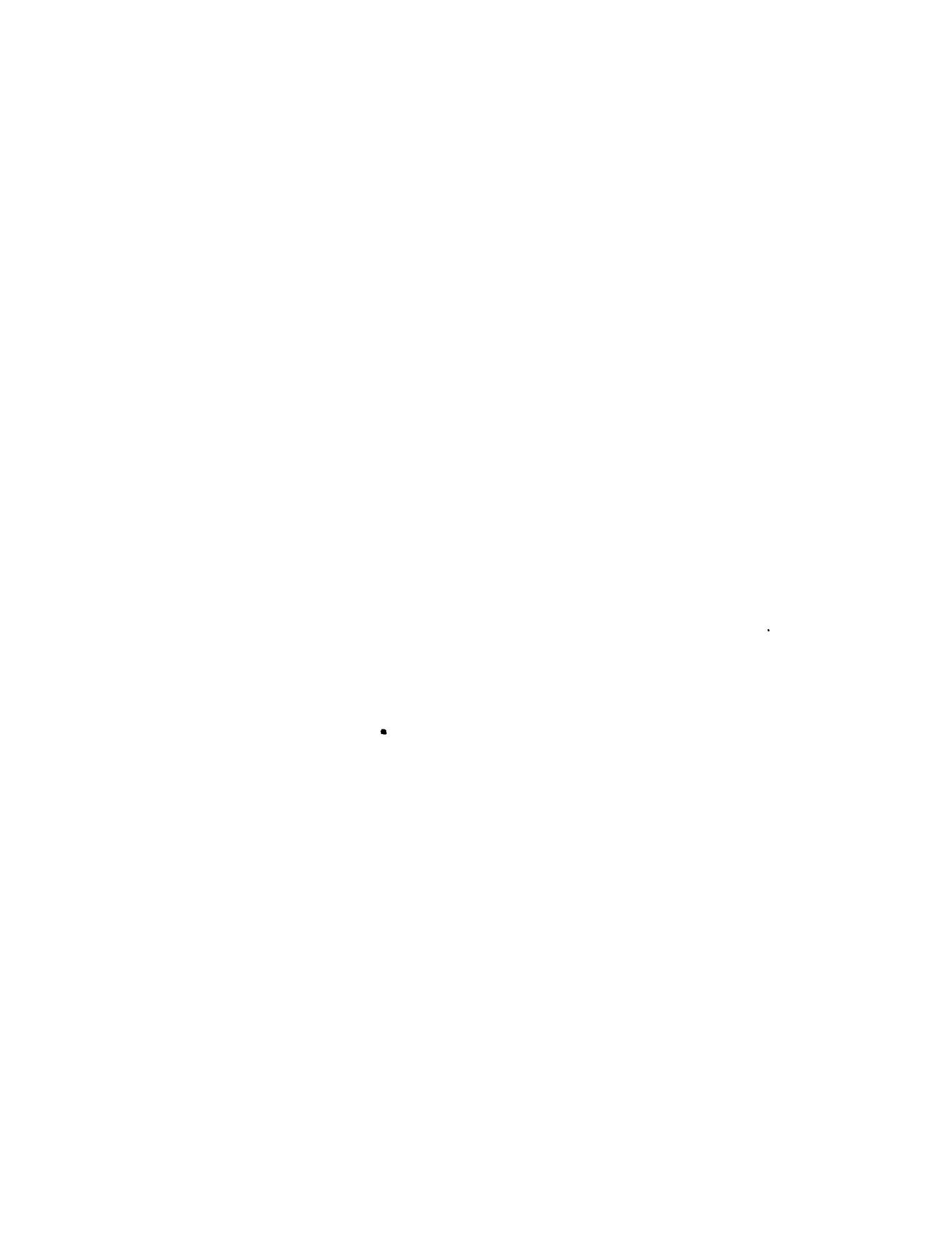
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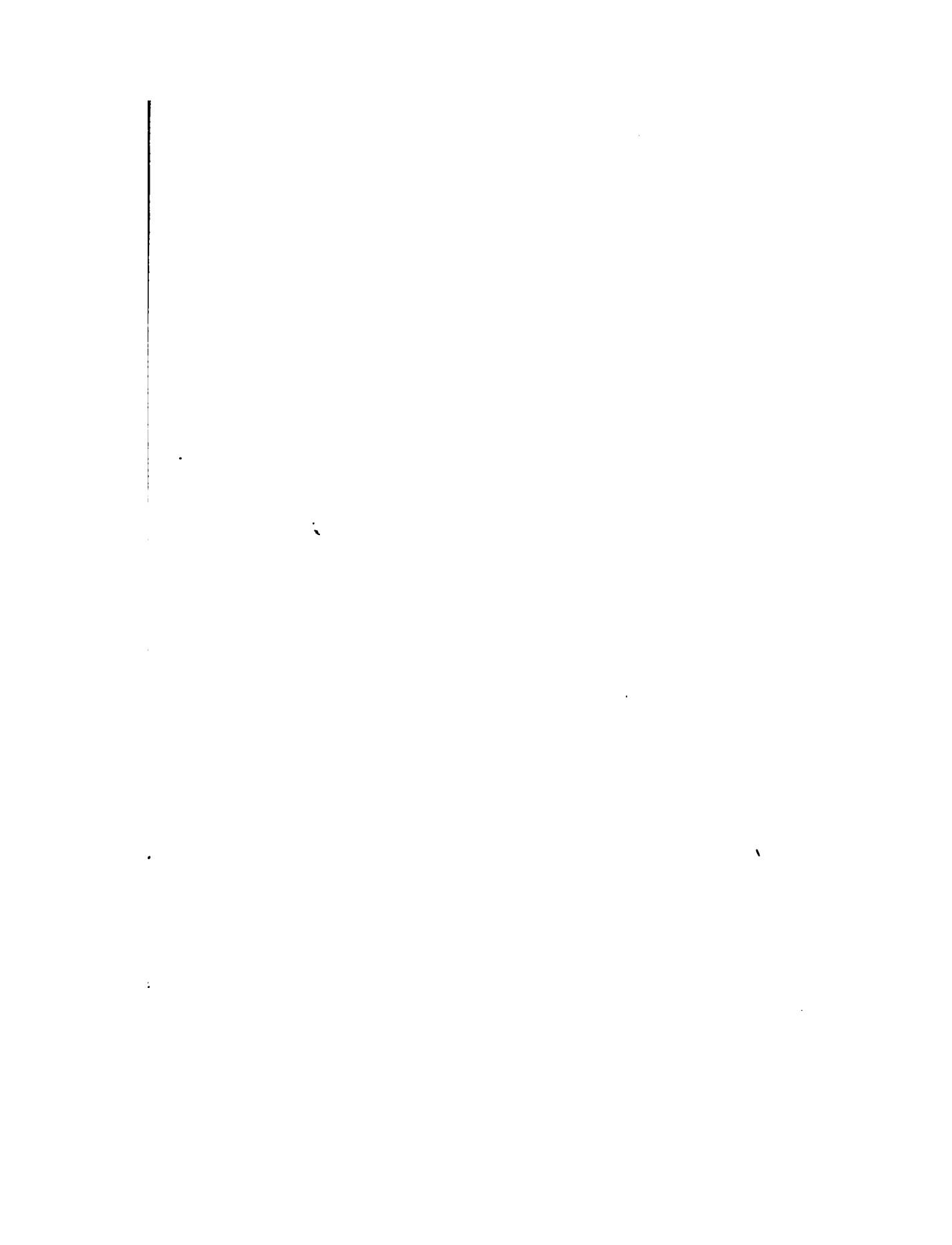


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ADAM MICKIEWICZ







A. Mickiewicz

*The National Poem
of Poland*

THE NATIONAL POEM
OF POLAND

BY
MONICA M. GARDNER



"Thou shalt see thy King come
with a crown upon his head,
born in thy own borders, and rejected
of men."

London: Printed for the Author
BEDFORD STREET, COVENT GARDEN, ENGLAND
NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO., LTD.



at 40 years

ADAM MICKIEWICZ

THE NATIONAL POET
OF POLAND

BY
MONICA M.^{RS}GARDNER



"Thou shalt see thy Love transpierced, dying
. . . and the sorrows of thousands shall be
born in thy one heart."—ZYGMUNT KRASINSKI.

LONDON: J. M. DENT & SONS LTD.
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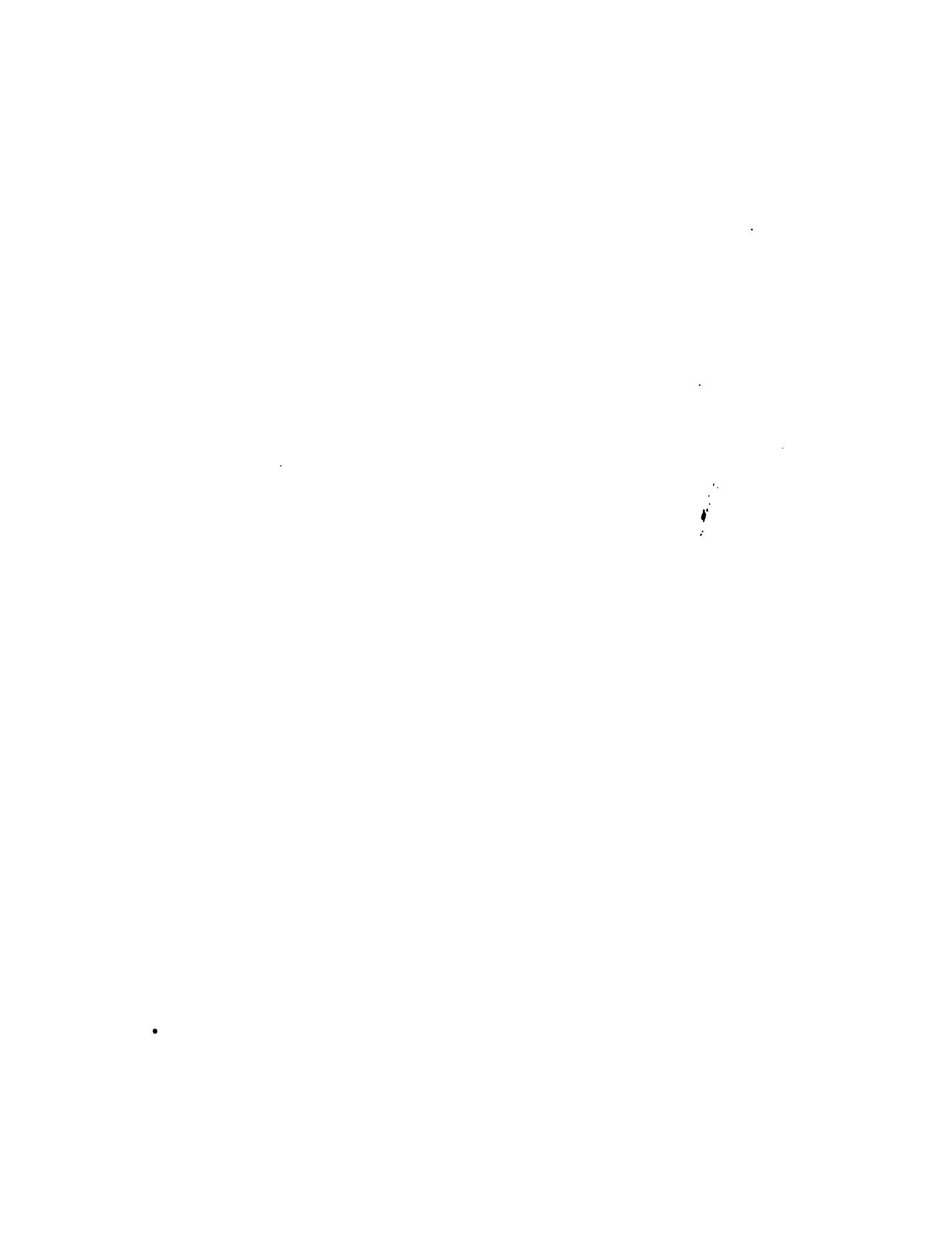
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Polonia Literary Circle
2/28-1928

TO
MY BROTHER
EDMUND G. GARDNER
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

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PREFACE

THIS book does not claim to be a full biography of Adam Mickiewicz. I have merely attempted to give a sketch of the work and character of a man who was not only Poland's most inspired poet and one of the noblest personalities in her history, but whose place is among the greatest idealists of the nineteenth century. I have, therefore, allowed myself a free hand, dwelling at greater length upon the more striking points in his career, and passing over, or else very lightly touching upon, others which seemed to me of less importance or of little interest to the English reader. By some strange turn of fate Mickiewicz, well known in other countries, is almost a stranger in England. His nation's splendid literature suffers from an equally inexplicable and a most regrettable neglect among us. If this book is fortunate enough to awaken in any English heart some interest or sympathy, not merely for the singularly attractive figure of the poet who is my subject, but still more for the sufferings, struggles and ideals of the great and heroic nation of whom he was the devoted son, my object in writing it will be fulfilled.

The unsatisfactory nature of the translations which

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I have given of Mickiewicz's poetry requires a word of apology. I have, in Chapter VI., explained some of the reasons why Polish, and especially any fine piece of Polish word-painting, is practically impossible to render in English with any degree of justice to the original. My attempts to translate the expressions of a master of style like Mickiewicz resolve themselves, it is to be feared, into what falls little short of a bald caricature of a glorious diction. I have only let them stand, hoping that, for all their shortcomings, they may succeed in giving some remote idea of the general character of Mickiewicz's writing to a reader to whom that work is utterly unknown. The translations are my own, and made directly from the Polish. In the case of *Thaddeus*, I am now and then indebted for a happy wording to Miss Biggs' translation ; but the similarities here and there between her renderings and mine of the same poem are more often fortuitous and unavoidable. I also owe something to Mr. Ladislas Mickiewicz's French translation of *The Improvisation*, given by M. Gabriel Sarrazin in his *Les Grands Poètes Romantiques de la Pologne* ; to Krystyn Ostrowski's French and W. J. Linton's English version of the *Ode to Youth*, from both of which I have now and then adopted a phrase.¹ For the convenience of the reader unacquainted with Polish, I have given my references in the footnotes in English when the originals are

¹ M. Biggs, *Master Thaddeus*, 2 vols., London, 1885. Krystyn Ostrowski, *Œuvres Poétiques de Adam Mickiewicz*, 2 vols., Paris, 1859.

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Polish ; but I have given the titles in the Bibliography in their own language.

I wish to express my most grateful thanks to Mr. Ladislas Mickiewicz, son of Adam Mickiewicz, whose kindness in lending me his own copy of his four-volumed biography of his father considerably lightened my labours ; to Mr. Edmund Naganowski, to whose constant encouragement, generous help, and unfailing sympathy I owe much of what knowledge I possess of the Polish language and literature ; to Father Paul Smolikowski ; and to my brother, Edmund Gardner, who read through my manuscript, and whose criticism and advice have been of the greatest assistance to me in my work.

M. M. G.

NOTE

I GIVE here a rough rule as to the pronunciation of those Polish letters of the alphabet which, occurring in proper names during the course of this book, are liable to present stumbling-blocks to the English reader from their dissimilarity to the laws of our pronunciation—

The Polish C = the English ts, but has a slightly softer sound before i.

Ch = strongly aspirated h.

Cz = ch in cherry.

Dz = j.

J = y.

Ł = a complicated sound, something between u and w.

Ó = oo in mood.

Si = something like sh, softly pronounced.

Sz = sh.

W = ff.

Ż, zi, and rz = the French j as in Jean.

The stress in Polish words is almost invariably on the penultimate; for example, Mickiewicz.

Mickiewicz is pronounced Mits-kee-eh-vitch.

I have simplified the Christian names as far as possible by substituting their English equivalents in those cases where the Polish forms offer any special difficulty to those who have not studied the language.

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CHAPTER I

YOUTH (1798-1823)

"Blessed be he who remembereth somewhere in the years of long ago, the sweet, strange, pure and winged life, his first beginning."
BOHDAN ZALESKI.

In order to understand aright the circumstances that not only inspired the genius of Adam Mickiewicz, the greatest poet of the Slavonic race, but that also gave Poland her wonderful romantic literature, it is necessary to have some idea, however slight, of the tragic years through which the nation passed after she had been torn asunder by the partitioning powers. The first two partitions of Poland took place in 1772 and 1793. The second partition was followed by Kościuszko's famous Rising, when that gallant leader's bands made a last and desperate stand to save their country. Borne down by the armies of Russia and Prussia, all was lost at the battle of Maciejowice. Kościuszko was taken prisoner; Warsaw was stormed by Suvorov, its inhabitants massacred under circumstances of atrocious barbarity: and, shortly after, in 1795—three years before the birth of Adam Mickiewicz—the final partition of Poland was effected.

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"There remained nothing more," says a Polish writer, "except a nation that refused to die."¹ From that day to this, Poland has never ceased to struggle for her lost nationality. Her sons, debarred from national life on the ordinary lines, have known how to live as Poles where and in what manner they best could, with the result that this national life has always been preserved even in the face of apparently overwhelming odds. After the Rising of 1830, the chief expression of the Polish spirit is to be found, as we shall see in the course of these pages, in the inspired strains of Mickiewicz, Zygmunt Krasinski, and the great band of Poland's poets. But at the earlier stage of the nation's misfortunes, during the years following the third partition, the years, namely, of Mickiewicz's childhood, the banners of Napoleon Bonaparte were the rallying-point of Polish patriotism. After Poland ceased to exist politically, the remaining regiments of her army carried their swords to France, and were enrolled, beneath their own flags and their own generals, under Napoleon. "Poland hath not perished while we live": so rings the well-known song of the Polish legions. Wherever Napoleon's armies marched, the Polish eagles led the Poles to deeds of valour, famous throughout all Europe. The brilliant charge of the Polish lancers at Somo Sierra lives in the annals of war with that of our Light Brigade at Balaclava: to the Polish legions fell the post of the rear-guard during the retreat of the Grand Army from Moscow. They

¹ *Sur le Projet d'un Nouveau Démembrement du Royaume de Pologne.* Conférence de V. Gasztowtt, published by the *Bulletin Polonais*, July 15th, 1909.

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lived and fought and died for one end : that Napoleon would lead them back to their own and liberated country.

That expectation proved to be one of the forlorn hopes of history. The Treaty of Tilsit in 1807 sacrificed Poland, and all that Napoleon did for those who had shed their blood beneath his banners, and who had given him a passionate love and loyalty that outlasted his own fall, was to found the little semi-independent Duchy of Warsaw, doomed to be swallowed up by the powerful governments surrounding it. The war that raged around this shred of Poland ended in the Treaty of Vienna, 1815, by which Poland was again divided between Russia, Austria and Prussia. Warsaw and much of the territory belonging to the Duchy, fated to become, beneath Russian rule, the most unhappy of nations, fell to the share of the Tsar. Granted, under the Tsar crowned as her king, a liberal constitution, promised the full enjoyment of her own laws, language and government, all of which were guaranteed by the contracting parties to the Treaty of Vienna, she was to be known henceforth as the Kingdom of Poland : and, even in these days when her ancient liberties have been utterly destroyed, the Poles still give this title to that part of their dismembered country.

The Kingdom, admirably organised and governed by Polish officials, began its existence with the fairest anticipations. Much was hoped from Alexander I., who had opened his career as a liberal reformer, and who had promised the friend of his youth, Prince Adam Czartoryski, when the latter was a hostage at

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the Russian Court, that he would restore Poland. How he betrayed his trust and delivered the nation whose rights he had pledged himself to respect to the fate of a conquered people is the history of the Rising of 1830. The liberties of the country were trampled under foot, her freedom changed into oppression, her nationality attacked by Russian espionage, imprisonment, tortures in the prisons. Maddened by their wrongs, the Poles flew to arms, and rose on the night of November 29th, 1830.

The story of that short and valiant struggle; of the terrible Russian revenge that was its result and which changed Poland—to use Montalembert's famous phrase—into “the nation in mourning;” belongs to the history of Adam Mickiewicz, and will be told there in its proper place. Then it was that the sorrows of the nation found expression in a literature that for its noble power, its lofty idealism, its deep pathos, ranks among the finest creations of European letters. Resembling in many respects the poetry of Sion, the great romantic literature of Poland came forth from bitter pain, persecution and bondage. Written—as a Polish author of our day words it—“in tears and blood,” it is one cry of a passionate, a personal grief. And yet its tone is that of neither pessimism nor despair. Mournful, tragic as are its strains, it breathes of mystic exaltation and of a deathless hope.

In those dark years succeeding the Rising of 1830, years when the Polish nation was ground down beneath the iron heel of Russia, when the mines of Siberia, the knout, the dungeon, were the penalties that the Pole paid for being a Pole; when he could cling to the

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thought of his beloved country, cherish her traditions, lead her life, in his own heart only ; it was under these conditions that the Polish poets stood forth as the leaders and guides of their people. The Pole might hear no more of Poland's history, no more of her hopes and aims : he found them told in the song of his nation's greatest and living poets. It became the calling of the latter to hold out before the eyes of the Polish youth those stern and glorious lessons of patriotism, of devotion, of self-immolation for his country's sake, that he could learn in no other way. It has been said that at this time the national life of Poland was dependent on her poets in a manner unknown in history since the days of ancient Greece.¹

Published with no little difficulty, often with danger to the exiled author, the poems were smuggled by Jews over the frontier into Russian Poland, there to be bought by their weight in gold, and read with the greatest peril. A few sworn friends, bound over to secrecy, would devour the book at midnight behind heavily-bolted doors and barred windows, with one of their number keeping watch in the street outside, ready to give the alarm. After some hurried intense readings the book was thrown into the fire.² The boys who read their great contemporary literature, and who only gleaned the history of their own times from Mickiewicz's *Thaddeus* and *The Ancestors*,³ knew well enough that discovery meant imprisonment or Siberia.

¹ Julian Klaczko, *Le Poète Anonyme de la Pologne*. Revue des Deux Mondes, January 1st, 1852.

² *Op. cit.*

³ *Ibid.*

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Hundreds of young men went to the mines for having reprinted an allegory of Krasinski's, or for possessing Mickiewicz's *Ancestors*, which latter work was banned in every division of partitioned Poland. For the crime of having been found with a copy of *The Ancestors*, a boy of seventeen was tortured in the Warsaw prison, till, in his terror lest he should be forced to betray his friends, he burned himself to death.¹ Such were the consequences that attended in their own country those great masterpieces of Polish literature that we may read entranced in the peace of our fireside.

Then, in the midst of misery and oppression, there arises, for a nation's consoling, the great Polish national mysticism, known under the name of Mesyanism, casting its strange unearthly radiance over that saddest of poetry. The destruction of Poland's very existence as a nation, the unavenged triumph of wrong, presented a difficulty to her poets and deepest thinkers that had to be solved, lest they and the nation should sink into atrophy and despair. They found in the theory of Mesyanism that they elaborated a reason that not only justified the action of Providence in the present, but that gave a spiritual promise, a moral sphere of action, a noble vocation, to a people cut off from earthly hopes and from work on ordinary lines. Special suffering, said they, is the token of a special calling, the prelude to a great exaltation. Death precedes the resurrection. From unheard-of pain will result glory in like measure. For many millions one

¹ For many years this tragic result of the poem that he had written haunted Mickiewicz's mind with its horror.

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must die. Poland, therefore, is passing through the furnace of suffering that, purified by its flames, she may become the leader of Christian, and more especially Slavonian, nations, and usher in the spiritual revolution of the universe, the higher epoch of humanity, when all races and governments will be united and will rule in brotherly love. Such is the great doctrine of Polish Mesyanism in its purest form, touching, it will be noticed, at certain points the tenets of Joachism. Various of its ramifications and developments led inevitably to exaggeration and extravagance ; but on the other hand that which was noble and admirable in its teaching, inasmuch as it sanctified the nation's suffering and pointed her to an heroic goal, accounts for the extraordinary power of nineteenth-century Polish literature, and for its peculiar and haunting fascination. To her poets, the resurrection of Poland signified something more than the restoration of a commonwealth. It stood as the triumphant righting for all time of a great crime against justice, the moral victory of light against darkness. Poland, therefore, is in the eyes of the Mesyanists more sacred than an earthly country : she signifies an ideal, a faith. The expression "Holy Poland," "The Holy One," will be met with in their writings. Led by Mickiewicz and Krasinski, they look upon themselves as a chosen race. Then, too, in the Polish literature of Mickiewicz's times, we find that close spiritual entwining of mysticism and nationality which can only be likened to that of the Hebrew prophets. For all its differences, the inspired poetry of the latter presents the best, indeed the only, analogy with the literature of perse-

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cuted Poland. As the eyes of Isaias or of Baruch turned ever to Jerusalem, to a holy and elected city exalted in a glory that was to shed its splendour to the uttermost boundaries of the earth : so we behold the Polish poets yearning towards an etherealised and transfigured country. With no imitation, for the Mesyanistic Polish poetry is the most original literature in Europe, some far-off echo of the song of the people that journeyed for forty years to a promised land, who were carried into a bitter bondage, and wept for their temple by the waters of Babylon, murmurs to the ear through the passionate mournful poems of sorrowing Poland.

In this, the golden age of Polish literature, three names stand out pre-eminently from a glowing constellation : those of Adam Mickiewicz, Julius Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasinski.

For the brilliance of his form and language, Słowacki ranks hardly below Mickiewicz himself. Beginning his poetical career as a close imitator of Byron, he ended it in early manhood—death took him at the age of thirty-nine—as a mystic and a devoted patriot. Krasinski, the most ethereal among the exponents of Mesyanism, taught his nation of the love that will conquer suffering, of the cross that brings man to the stars.¹ The third and greatest member of this trinity of inspired poets, Adam Mickiewicz, is the subject of this book.

On the Christmas Eve of 1798, Adam Mickiewicz was born in the Lithuania whose wild, untrodden

¹ “Thou hast given us, O Lord, a cross that brings us to Thy stars.” Zygmunt Krasinski, *Psalm of Good Will*.

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forests, whose ever-changing and storm-laden skies, he has painted in colours unsurpassed in his nation's literature. To the influences of his childhood he owed much that was great both in his character and in his genius. He was the son of an old house that had gone down in the world. His father, Nicholas Mickiewicz, was a somewhat struggling lawyer, who found the maintenance of his little family of four boys no easy task. Of his mother, Barbara, dead in his early manhood, Adam always retained the tenderest recollection. A woman of strong character and deep piety, it was she who was chiefly responsible for the education of her sons. From the time of the partition of Poland, Lithuania had passed into the grasp of Russia and never knew even that evanescent freedom that fell to the lot of the Kingdom of Poland in the early days following the Congress of Vienna. Daily life held, therefore, difficult moments for the Lithuanian household of Mickiewicz's boyhood ; and his mother's presence of mind, shown for instance in her quickness in hiding compromising papers in her shoes, often saved her family from disaster.

But, as yet, while Mickiewicz was a child in his father's house, the terrible persecutions that were to overwhelm his country were hidden in the future, and the Lithuanian home could still be happy. A patriarchal simplicity, an open-air life in the forests, a hospitality that threw wide the doors of the house to all comers, affectionate and intimate relations between masters and servants, made, as Mickiewicz himself once said, the Lithuania of his youth the most delightful of lands to live in. He was brought up in

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an atmosphere of old-fashioned homely purity and virtue, sweet as lavender. Devoted affection united the children and the father and mother. Exile and the consequences of the Rising of 1830 were to part the brothers, so that Adam scarcely knew in later times which of them were alive or dead; but the fond memories of the home were always enshrined in his heart, and his love was unbroken by fate or absence. From his earliest years, Mickiewicz was taught the lessons of a burning patriotism. His family had kept true to the ancient Polish virtues and to all that was best in Polish tradition, and the Mickiewicz children's greatest joy was to listen to the tales which their parents told them of their ancestors' glorious deeds for Poland. Primitive and remote Lithuania, with its marshes and its huge tracts of virgin forests where even the foot of the hunter has never penetrated and where the urus still lingers, is the home of romantic lore. Mickiewicz was reared on these old-world legends. Of an evening, he heard from his nurse's lips the traditions of the wild countryside. He sat in the peasants' huts, and hung upon the stories and songs of the girls who came to spin flax at his mother's house. This love of a nation's folk-lore, his passionate attachment to the soil whence it sprang, coloured the whole course of his future life and of his poetical inspiration.

As the boys grew old enough for their schooling, Nicholas Mickiewicz moved house into the town of Nowogródek, where Adam and his brothers went to daily school. Adam was not a precocious boy, nor had he a trace of the morbid poet child. That beautiful simplicity of soul that was so marked a feature of

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his character seems to have been his birthright. His school years showed him to be a clever lad, but he apparently gave no signs then of the genius that was in him, except for the fact that he was gifted with an extraordinary memory. After Adam himself was snug in bed, his brother Francis used to sit at the table hammering—schoolboy fashion—the morrow's lesson into his brain. The future poet would run up to him to inquire what they had to repeat the next day. His brother read it out, whereupon Adam jumped back into bed, tucked himself comfortably up in his blankets, went off to sleep, and repeated perfectly in class the task over which his less fortunate brother had been obliged to burn the midnight oil. Nicholas Mickiewicz would never permit his young sons to idle. Each boy was given some little employment about the house, such as keeping the library in order, looking after the papers. After school hours were over for the day, the father read aloud some masterpiece in poetry or prose, memoirs, new discoveries in science, but, above all, the burning topics of the moment. For, in Mickiewicz's boyhood, the first years of the nineteenth century, even the quietest homes in Poland and Lithuania rang with the exploits of the Polish legions, fighting beyond the frontiers under Napoleon's flags. Mickiewicz has told how from time to time a maimed wanderer would beg at the door for alms and, looking cautiously about him to see that no Russian soldier were in hearing, would whisper that he was a legionary come to lay his bones in his native land. Then the household, masters and servants, gathered around him weeping, greedily

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drinking in his stories of the prowess of the Polish leaders and seating him, an honoured guest, at their table. The news he gave was secretly retold over all the country. Many a boy who had listened disappeared mysteriously from the homestead : fled by hidden ways through the forests and marshes ; with the Russian pursuers at his heels flung himself into the River Niemen, swam for his life to the other side that brought him to the Polish banners in the Duchy of Warsaw, and, safely landed, shouted to the Russians left behind, "Till we meet again!" Sometimes a friar from foreign parts found his way to one of the manor-houses, and, unripping his scapular, drew out the gazette with the names of battles and lists of the dead and wounded. Fathers and mothers, ignorant for years of the fate of a dearly-loved son who had left them for Poland's sake, read there of his death or life, as the case might be. The neighbours saw the family go into mourning, for whom it was not safe to say, though all guessed : and the quiet grief or equally quiet joy of the mansion was the war gazette for the countryside.¹

So patriotic a house as that of Nicholas Mickiewicz could not fail to follow, with hearts that beat for hope, each one of the stirring events then doing in the world. One of Mickiewicz's brothers has left us a pleasant picture of the family gathered together in the evenings. Adam is seated under the lamp, reading out the latest news of the war. The father, already drawing near his grave, supported by his stick walks about the room, unable to sit still for his emotion. The mother, at

¹ Adam Mickiewicz, *Thaddeus*, Book I.

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her needle, embroidering national emblems, watches her dying husband furtively and with tear-dimmed eyes. One boy traces out the march of Napoleon's armies on the map. The others listen while busied over different tasks. Those were the great days of Adam's life, his golden recollections. The spring of 1812 was one never to be forgotten by the Polish people. Napoleon, upon whom all the national hopes were centred, whom the boundless love and expectation of the mystic Poles surrounded with a sort of supernatural halo, was in Poland with the legions marching to the invasion of Russia, and the whole nation, wild with joy, welcomed the Russian campaign as the earnest of their deliverance from bondage. "God is with Napoleon, Napoleon is with us," was their watch-word. Long after, when the sorrows of exile and the bitterness of frustrated hope had made joy a stranger to Mickiewicz's heart, his yearning thoughts travelled back to the memory of that dream-like spring, when even the strange glowing promise of the fields and orchards and the cries of the birds of passage returning early to the Lithuanian marshes from their winter haunts, seemed to men's minds the heralding of resurrection.

In his great poem *Thaddeus*, written in 1833-34, Mickiewicz sang the pæan of that wonderful year. So strong a light does it cast on the scenes that impressed him deeply as a boy that we give some of its stanzas here :—

"Oh, spring ! I saw thee in our land. Memorable spring of war, spring of plenty. Oh spring, flowering with corn and grass, brilliant with men, fertile in deed, pregnant with

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hope ! Born in captivity, fettered while in swaddling-bands, only one such spring have I known in my life.

“ To this day the people call thee the year of plenty, and the soldier the year of war. To this day, the aged love to tell tales of thee, to this day song dreams of thee. Long wert thou heralded by heavenly marvel¹ and preceded by low rumours among the people. With the sun of spring some strange presentiment filled Lithuanian hearts as though before the end of the world : some yearning expectation full of joy.

“ The peasants, following the plough, do not rejoice as usual for the long winter’s end. They sing no songs. Slowly they labour, as if they remembered neither seed nor harvest. Each step they keep the horse and ox within the harrows, and gaze in fear towards the western sky, as though some portent from that side should rise. In fear they watch the returning birds.

“ Already the stork flew home to his native pine, and spread his white wings, an early banner of spring. And, after him, the swallows arrived in screaming battalions, flocking over the waters, drawing mud from the frozen earth for their little houses. In the evening, you heard the whispers of marching snipes in the thickets. And flocks of wild geese murmur above the forest till they sink weary with loud clamour for their halt upon the earth. And cranes are ever wailing in the dark depths of the sky. The night watchman, hearkening, asks himself, alarmed, whence has arisen this trouble in the winged kingdom ? What storm has driven these birds so early home ?

“ Till, lo ! fresh troops arrive. Like finches, plovers, starlings, flocks of bright plumes and banners flash on the hills, fall on the plains. It is the cavalry. Strange uniforms, weapons never beheld before in Lithuania. Regiment after regiment. Then are the forests black with soldiers’ caps, the lines of bayonets flash, and—as a swarming ant-hill—the numberless infantry come.

“ All to the North ! Men, horses, cannon, eagles, stream

¹ A great comet visible in 1811.

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by day and night. Afire, the heavens flame. The earth with thunder shakes.

“War ! War ! There was no corner of Lithuanian earth whither its clamour did not reach. In the dark forests, the peasants, whose grandfathers and fathers died without having looked out beyond the frontiers of the woods, who heard no other sound in the sky save the tempest, no other sound on the earth save the roaring of beasts, who saw no other guests besides his fellow-dwellers in the forest, now sees strange fires burning in the sky, hears a strange crashing in the forest—the ball that, wandering from the field of battle, seeks a path in the wood, tears up the trunks of trees, and hews down boughs. The urus, hoary and bearded, trembles in his lair of moss, bristles his mane’s long hair, and, with a shaking beard, gazes astounded on a flashing burning waste that breaks out in the brushwood. ’Tis a shell that has lost its way. It writhes, it seethes, it hisses, it bursts with a roar like thunder. Urus, affrighted for the first time in his life, flees to take shelter in his deepest hiding-place.

“A battle ! Where ? Where ? ” cry the young men, flying to arms. Women lift up their hands to heaven. All, certain of victory, cry out with tears: ‘God is with Napoleon, Napoleon is with us.’”¹

Short-lived were the hopes of that spring. Young Adam watched the return of the Grand Army from Russia, fugitive, ragged, starving. In after years he told his children strange stories of the disastrous winter ; how he had seen a young French officer fling himself from his horse to snatch up and devour voraciously a piece of tallow candle lying in the road; how the French soldiers smashed the paling that encircled his home for their fuel; how a great black dog, coming no one knew whence, prowled about the

¹ Adam Mickiewicz, *Taddeus*, Book XI.

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house all through the long Lithuanian winter, as if to protect its inmates in those perilous times, and vanished with the spring as mysteriously as it had appeared.

We know very few details of Mickiewicz's boyhood. His father's death in that same eventful year of 1812 brought the already slender finances of the family lower, and Adam worked hard in consequence at his studies. During the last two years of his school life he acted as a sort of monitor, and performed the duty well and conscientiously. It was at this time that he made one of those warm school friendships that last with life, and that in his case was to be sealed by the fire of a common adversity. We shall see how deep and intimate were the relations between Mickiewicz and Jan Czecztot.

Mickiewicz left school in 1814, and in the following year entered the University of Wilna. He carried with him a character of unstained excellence and the love of every one who knew him. There was about him some wonderful fascination, an extraordinary power of captivating hearts that remained with him all his life.

His University career proved to be the crucial influence on his soul. It was a time when the flower of the young Lithuanian manhood were on fire with the sacred flame of youth in its noblest form, pure, generous, idealistic. The director of the movement, he who was beloved with a passionate devotion by the students who owed him so much of what was highest and best in themselves, was Thomas Zan. There is something singularly attractive about the picture which has come down to us of this whole-hearted leader of

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men, firm, courageous, winning in his gentleness, so faithful to his own ideal that he may truly be said to have laid down his life for his friends. That is to say, all that makes life dear—home, country, freedom. “An open heart, eyes that penetrated into the soul, a kind and bright word for everybody, compassion and indulgence for others, severity towards himself, the incarnation of faith and love.”¹ Such is the description given of the guide of his youth by Ignacy Domeyko, the life-long friend of Adam Mickiewicz and one of the last survivors of Zan’s devoted band, who, after sixty years of exile, found his way back in his old age to die in his native country. It was in the order of things that a man like Zan, who united to the loftiness of his character and aims the charm of a most engaging manner, should become Mickiewicz’s chosen comrade : and together they founded the famous student societies, known in Polish history as those of the Philomathians and the Radians, which latter merged later into the Philaretians.

The members of the brotherhood pledged themselves to labour all their lives for the welfare of their country ; to reform youth ; by their personal example and teaching to influence for good the students at the University, and when their own University career should be ended, any other young men who came across their paths. Nor was absence to dissolve the links that held the association together. Each individual was to be spurred to continual action by

¹ Ignacy Domeyko, *Kronika Rodzinna*. January 1st, 1889, quoted by Mr. L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*. Posen, 1890. (Polish.)

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keeping the others informed of the different work upon which he was engaged, so that no one should be allowed to fritter away his days in frivolity or egotism. The Philaretians were a sort of younger edition of the Philomathians. These were, of course, patriotic associations. But, although the happiness of their country was their dearest dream, their aims cannot be called revolutionary. They had, apparently, no clear idea of any rising before their eyes, but were convinced that the best way of working for the good of Poland was by purifying and ennobling her youth.

That the moral benefit of these confraternities was enormous is undeniable. They were united by ideals of the highest ethical and philanthropical order. The character of each candidate was subjected to a searching scrutiny before he was permitted to enter the ranks. Long rambles and simple country pleasures, literary exercises, were the outer links that bound the family to one of those leaders who arise from time to time to inspire those under him with a devotion that follows him even to death. Zan watched over the young lives that had given themselves into his keeping with a sort of paternal and tender solicitude. Owing to his prudence, the Philaretians were kept shielded from the revolutionary societies that were preparing the Rising of 1830 ; and when at last the storm burst over their heads, it was his foresight that saved numbers of those whom he had guided from his own fate.¹

As Dr. Kallenbach observes, Mickiewicz entered the association of the Philomathians as an upright,

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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but in no way a particularly remarkable, boy.¹ But there was something in his nature to which the ideals of the brotherhood struck home as to congenial soil, for when he left Wilna he was on his way to become the figure of moral grandeur that won him the admiration and love, undying to this day, of the whole Polish nation. That divine flame of his youth never died through all the tempests of a singularly troubled life.

Mickiewicz spent four years in the University, from 1815 to 1819. He did brilliantly at his studies, and, moreover, his strong poetic and literary bent declared itself. He wrote poetry for the meetings of the Philomathians, and published a few pieces of prose in the magazines. Even at this early stage of his career he had formed his great theory upon which he built his poetical life, that the school of the poet is that of self-sacrifice and consecration.

He passed his final examinations with high honours and obtained the post of a schoolmaster at Kowno. The next four years—the last that he was to spend in his native land—were fraught with the deepest significance to his poetic life. In these years his inspiration rose. For a short while he passed through the happiest moments he ever knew. During his last year at Wilna, he had met during the vacations Marya Wereszczak. This girl was destined by her family for a rich suitor, but, although both she and Adam practically knew that they might never belong to each other, they fell in love. The first two years of Mickiewicz's stay at Kowno were coloured by romantic passion. During

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*. Cracow, 1897. (Polish.)

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his holidays he lived the light-hearted, pleasant country life that he afterwards immortalised in the pages of his *Thaddeus*. Russian oppression was at that time felt comparatively little in remote districts ;¹ the manor-house joyously bade welcome every guest ; there was hunting, shooting, delightful rambling about the forests, simple merrymaking of young men and girls together. Then it was that Mickiewicz learnt that intimate devotion to Nature that gives his descriptive passages their inimitable charm. We shall hear all the sounds of the Lithuanian forests in his lyre ; the calls of the birds ; the roar of the wind howling through the giant primeval trees. At night he wandered through the forests beneath oaks as old as time, that were said to have looked down upon the semi-legendary heroes of Lithuania. He spent hours by the moonlit lakes. He listened while the fishermen sang their songs and legends. All these things gave his genius its definite direction. The romantic revival in European letters had set in, and Mickiewicz is now to stand forth as the greatest romantic poet of his nation, the founder of her modern literature.

In the full fire of his young manhood, the boy of twenty-two may be said to have opened his poetical career by the splendid *Ode to Youth*. This noble trumpet-call to his young compatriots to rise to a higher life is the best illustration of the ideals and aims of the Philomathians :—

“Without heart, without soul, those are the nations of skeletons. Oh, youth, give me wings ! Let me soar above a

¹ Gabriel Sarrazin, *Les Grands Poètes Romantiques de la Pologne*.
Paris, 1906.

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dead world to the heavenly country of dreams where enthusiasm works miracles, strews fresh flowers and clothes hope in golden pictures.

“Let he whose vision age has dimmed, bending his furrowed brow to earth, look on the world’s globe by the limit of his darkened eyes.

“Oh, youth ! Soar thou beyond the horizon’s bounds, and with the eyes of sun pierce thou the mighty multitudes of the human race from end to end.

“Gaze down ! There where eternal night darkens the mighty plain submerged in the chaos of sloth, there is the earth. See how upon its stagnant waters has risen some reptile in its shell; rudder and ship and pilot to itself, feeding upon the smaller reptiles’ life. It rises, then it sinks into the deep. The wave clings not to it, it clings not to the wave. And then it bursts against the fragment of a rock. None knew it when alive, or knows its death. It is the egotist.

“Oh, youth ! The nectar of life is only sweet when it is shared with others. The joys of heaven inebriate our hearts when they are bound together by one golden thread.

“Together, young friends ! The happiness of each is the aim of all, mighty in union, in enthusiasm wise. Together, young friends ! And happy is he who, fallen in the midst of his career, makes with his dead body a rung of the ladder for others to reach the garden of glory. Together, young friends ! Although the road be slippery and steep, and violence and weakness forbid the entrance, let violence hurl violence back, and let us learn to conquer weakness while we are young.

“He who as a child in the cradle smote off the Hydra’s heads, in youth shall tear from hell its victim, and ascend to heaven on laurels. Reach where the eye does not reach. Break what the understanding will not break. Oh youth ! thy flight shall be as the strength of eagles, as a thunderbolt thine arm.

“Then, shoulder to shoulder ! With the chains that bind

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us to each other, let us engirdle the little circle of the earth. To one end let our thoughts aim, and to one end let aim our souls.¹ Leave thy foundations far, thou earthy world ! We will force new paths upon thee till, having shaken off thy rotten skin, thou wilt remember thy past verdant years.

“And as in the lands of chaos and of night, of elements at war, at one ‘Let it be,’ spoken from the might of God, the living world stood forth, the winds roared, the deep seas flowed, and stars lit up the blue of heaven :

“So in the country of humanity there is still deep night. The elements, men’s passions, are still at war. Lo, love shall breathe forth fire. From chaos shall come forth the spiritual world. Youth shall conceive it in its womb, and friendship shall bind it in eternal bonds.

“The frozen and unfeeling bursts, and the dark prejudice that hid the light. Hail, dawn of liberty, that brings the redeeming sun.”

It was with these words ringing in their hearts that the young sons of Lithuania were soon called upon to face the crisis of their lives. For clouds were gathering fast on the horizon. In the Kingdom of Poland that system of oppression was beginning which proved to the Poles how much the fair promises of Alexander I. were worth, and which was steadily and inevitably leading up to the Rising of 1830. In Lithuania the Russian Commissioner, Novosiltzov, notorious alike for his brutality and his detestation of Poland, was busy trying to ferret out some imaginary plot lurking behind the gatherings of the student societies. But even before the fast-approaching storm swept Mickiewicz forth into an exile’s and a pilgrim’s ways, the poet’s golden hours were ended. In 1820,

¹ Dr. Kallenbach points out that these words were specially directed against the want of unity that had been so fatal to Poland.

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two heavy blows fell upon him. His mother died, and Marya Wereszczak made a wealthy marriage for the sake of her impoverished family. The sorrows of his disappointed love darkened Mickiewicz's days till the stern teaching of the prison awoke him, as his own Konrad of *The Ancestors*, to a new life. Lonely and bereaved, with none of his best friends near at hand to give him their sympathy, Mickiewicz went to his books. Those solitary and studious years, from Marya's marriage till his imprisonment in 1823, did much towards making his mind the storehouse of erudition that it became. For it must always be remembered that Mickiewicz was not only a great poet: he was also a deep thinker.

Then poetic inspiration took possession of him. The poems of Goethe and Schiller fired his imagination, and he too wrote his ballads. But his ghostly riders and haunted lakes and water maidens rising from their waves have their own Lithuanian colouring. Mickiewicz took them from the legends and folk-stories that he had gathered from the peasants. One of the most poetical stories that he tells in the ballads is that of the fairy lake, covered with water-lilies. In answer to their prayer to be delivered from murder and outrage, the women of an invaded town sank with their homes to the bottom of the lake, while they themselves were turned into water-lilies. Retaining in death the white stainlessness of their life, no hand may pluck them, for whoever touches these flowers is smitten by some mortal ill and dies. The ballads are not merely interesting as emphasising the poet's faithful attachment to national traditions, but

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already we find in them the enunciation of the principles by which he guided his whole life and work.

"Have a heart, and look into thy heart;" "Feeling and faith speak more strongly to me than the wisdom of the wise man;" are two of his cherished maxims that first see the light in one of these poems.

From the ballads he soon passed on to stronger work. While still at Kowno, he gave the world the tale of his love for "Maryla," his poetic name for Marya Wereszczak, in Parts I., II. and IV. of his play, *The Ancestors*. These earlier scenes of his famous drama rank immeasurably below the great Third Part which, written long afterwards out of a heart torn with grief at the sight of his nation's misery, is the supreme tragedy of an oppressed and persecuted race. The whole play offers no little difficulty to detailed criticism on account of its incompleted state. The different parts hang but loosely together. Part III., indeed, with its separate and mournful dedication to the first three of Mickiewicz's comrades who had died in exile, stands alone in its sombre grandeur, outwardly scarcely touching the rest of the play, but connected to it by a spiritual and psychological link of the deepest significance in Mickiewicz's own inner life. This will be dwelt upon later. At present our business is with Parts I., II. and IV.

The drama is founded on the semi-pagan feast of the dead which still lingered in Lithuania in the days of our poet. Of extremely remote origin, veneered over by a slight tinge of Christianity, the celebration

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was held on the night of All Souls' Day in a lonely chapel or in some dwelling close to the cemeteries, and in strict secrecy on account of the ban of the Church. A repast was spread for the dead whose souls, at the call of the wizard, appeared to ask for succour or to tell their fate. How strongly Mickiewicz's imagination was haunted by the strange folk-tales of those unearthly incantations and ghostly banquets at dead of night that he had heard from the peasants in his childhood may be seen from the fact that not only did he set his own love story against this supernatural background : but that his noblest expression of that life-long devotion to his country, in whose flame all other passions died, lives in the literature of the world under the title of the Lithuanian feast of the dead.

In *The Ancestors* then—it must be borne in mind that we are only at the moment dealing with Parts I., II. and IV.—we are transported into that world of spirits that all his life strongly attracted Mickiewicz and that proved to have a fatal fascination for his mind. The doors of the chapel are closed. The darkness and the silence of an All Souls' night is upon us. The windows are heavily shrouded, so that not even one ray of moonlight may shine to the eyes of those who keep vigil, awaiting the sight of those they loved on earth.

“‘Souls from Purgatory,’” (cries the wizard.) “‘Wher-ever in the world ye be! Ye who burn in flaming pitch! Ye who freeze beneath river-beds! Ye, who, for more grievous penance fastened in the logs of wood that the flames gnaw in

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the stoves, weep and whistle mournfully!¹ Hasten all to this our meeting! Let us all meet here together. Lo, we keep the Ancestors. Come ye to the holy precincts. Here are alms and here are prayers. Here is food and here is drink.''²

The chorus of peasants :

"All is dark and all is still. What will come? Oh, what will come?"

The wizard turns to them and bids them give him a handful of incense :

"I will light it. You shall quickly, when the flamelet shoots on high, drive it with the lightest breathing. Thus, oh thus, and further, further. Let it burn upon the air."

Then he pronounces the charm :

"Come ye first, light fluttering spirits. Ye who in this vale of woe, tears and toil and dark confusion, flashed one moment, then died out, even as my grains of incense. Ye who wander on the world's highway, without reaching Heaven's gates, by this light and burning token you we summon and conjure."

And to his incantation, golden wings tremble about the roof like leaves dancing in the breeze, and two tiny spirit children cry to their mother, who stands among the women :—

"Oh, mother, for thy children the road to Heaven is shut,"

because they knew nothing but happiness on earth, and he who has never once tasted bitterness may

¹ A Polish piece of folk-lore that, when the logs burning in the stoves hiss or seem to wail, it is because a soul from Purgatory is there imprisoned and asking help.

² The food and drink prepared at the feast for the souls of the dead were considered an efficacious means of helping them. The curious mixture of rank paganism with a thread of Christianity is noticeable in all the scene.

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not taste sweetness in Heaven. Answering their entreaties, the wizard lays a bitter grain upon their lips, and they fly rejoicing to Paradise. The ceremony proceeds with similar incantations, but adapted to each class of ghost. At the hour of midnight, the door is heavily barred and, to the flare of a pitcher of burning brandy set on fire with a torch of resinous pinewood, there appears at the window a horrible phantom of the cruel lord, surrounded, under the shape of black tormenting birds of prey, by the souls of those he had starved or ground down. He may find no mercy for:—

“He who was never man, him may man never help.”

So it goes on. Then, last of all in the procession, when the cock's crow heralds the close of the rites, a pale belated spectre stands before the watchers. He points to his bleeding heart in silence that no entreaty, curse or incantation of the wizard or chorus can break. He is Gustavus, the hero of the play. Whether the rejected and despairing lover has in reality put an end to his life, or whether he has merely metaphorically died of love, which is never quite certain, he is the embodiment of Mickiewicz's own dead dreams. Such is the connection of the love-lorn Gustavus with the feast of the Ancestors. He reappears in Part IV. to sing the disillusion of his baffled hopes, but whether he is in the flesh or out of the flesh we never know. For at each stroke of the clock he halts in his frenzy to count the hours as one doomed, and he vanishes when midnight tolls.

Part IV. of *The Ancestors* palpitates with passion.

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Into Gustavus' complaint, Mickiewicz pours out his sad regret for the girl to whom, although both he and she had known from the beginning that they must part, the first freshness of the poet's heart had been given. Yet by one of those curious turns of his many-sided genius that occur more than once in Mickiewicz's poetic and mental history,¹ he brought out together with his story of his love his first national epic, *Grażyna*. Side by side with the wild Byronic Gustavus, raving of suicide and despair, stands the calm, passionless, heroically-proportioned figure of the warrior princess.

It was to Lithuania, the land of heroic traditions and romantic song, that Mickiewicz turned for the subject of each of his three epics. The poet, Zygmunt Krasinski, has said that noble as is the diction of *Grażyna*, "it is one of those works that is only destined to the admiration of its own country, and which can move a Polish heart alone."² In *Grażyna*, we have none of that pathetic under-current of an exile's yearning that murmurs through the lines of *Konrad Wallenrod*, and still more in those of *Thaddeus*, like the sighing of the poet's own Lithuanian forests. Nor does it present the reader with anything like the great moral question of Wallenrodism. As a work of art it cannot be compared to Mickiewicz's swan song, *Thaddeus*, with its local colouring, its exquisite

¹ M. Zdziechowski, *Mesyanists and Slaveophiles*. Cracow, 1888. (Polish.)

² *Konrad Wallenrod*, etc. Article published by Zygmunt Krasinski in the *Bibliothèque Universelle* (Littérature), t. xlv., October, 1830, given by Dr. Kallenbach, *Correspondance de Sigismond Krasinski et de Henry Reeve*. Paris, 1903.

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descriptions of Nature and its splendid historical setting. Yet there is about *Grażyna* a fine, heroic flavour. It rings with the virility and rude strength of the hardy sons of Lithuania, whose lives were war for the independence of their country. The clash of arms resounds in its grave tempered style.¹

Briefly, the story of *Grażyna* is as follows :—The Prince of Lithuania, the husband of the heroine after whom the poem is called, is about to make a disgraceful treaty with the Teutonic knights, the inveterate enemies of Lithuania. He has sworn with their help to lead his army at dawn upon a treacherous expedition. On her knees his wife implores her husband to refuse such overtures and to send the Teutonic envoys back with a different answer. Her entreaty is in vain. Through some mistake, a message is conveyed to the knights, which they construe into one of defiance, and at once begin hostilities. *Grażyna* steals into her husband's room while he is asleep, puts on his armour, and rides out to do battle at the head of the Lithuanian troops, who believe that they are following their prince. Mortally wounded, she is borne from the field by her husband, who has woken to rush to the scene of action : and, beseeching his pardon for her “first and only deception,” she dies, “a woman in charm, a hero in soul,” as the despairing husband laments over her funeral pyre.

When the Polish nation rose against Russia in 1830, a high-spirited girl, named Emilia Plater, raised a province in Lithuania and fought as a soldier till,

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*: and Mochnacki's criticism, given by Dr. Kallenbach, *op. cit.*

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worn out by privation and hardship endured with courage beyond her sex, she died in a lonely hiding-place in her native forests, her heart broken at the failure of the Rising. It is said that it was to the influence of Mickiewicz's epic that the Polish Rising of 1830 owed its famous heroine. But be that as it may, *Grażyna* is a very typical expression of one aspect of Polish ideals. The women of Poland have always held a position of peculiar honour and influence for good in the nation's life. That the greatest Polish poet accurately judged the temper of his country-women was proved but a few years after he had written *Grażyna*. Not only Emilia Plater, but bands of women and girls fought in the Rising side by side with their husbands and brothers with a self-devotion that stands out among the records of that gallant war.

But to Mickiewicz it was not given to dream longer either of the woman he had loved or of the far historic past. The bitter inheritance of the Pole soon fell upon him. Shortly after he had published *Grażyna* and *The Ancestors*, he was called to prove his soul in the struggle.

CHAPTER II

IMPRISONMENT AND RUSSIAN EXILE (1823-1829)

“Oh, my country ! Perchance all will return unto thy meadows, but I shall not return. Death, or what fate casts on my stony road through life—all keeps me back from thee.” JULIUS SŁOWACKI.

SINCE the arrival of Novosiltzov in Lithuania, the doom of the young men who worked in the students' societies was only a matter of time. The Russian agents were at work to forge a plot out of Zan's associations : house-to-house inquisitions began. Foreseeing events, Zan burned the papers of the confraternity, dissolved the younger branch of it altogether, and suspended the work of the Philomathians till happier days. Picked members of the brotherhood took upon themselves the task of preparing the weaker vessels for the struggle, either by personal visits or by sending round letters entrusted to some safe hand. But nothing could avert the storm. In the May of 1823, a boy of fifteen, one of the Plater family that gave both valiant sons and daughters to the roll-call of the Rising of 1830, scrawled upon the slate in the class-room, “Vivat the Constitution of the Third of May” ; which was, it will be remembered, the liberal and enlightened constitution passed by the last independent Polish diet in 1791. This was the match to the mine, the pretext upon which the Russian Government seized. Schoolboys, students, teachers, were flung into prison. On

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the night of October 23rd, 1823, Mickiewicz and Thomas Zan were arrested. Incarcerated in the Basilian convent used, Russian fashion, for the prison, Mickiewicz there found his dearest friends with whom he was called upon to suffer side by side, and whose names remain for all time in the pages of Part III. of *The Ancestors*.

For now begins the dark tale of the persecution of the Lithuanian youth, scenes that Mickiewicz has inscribed in letters as of fire in that great Third Part of his patriotic drama. The affair was managed by Novosiltzov, the sworn enemy of everything that was Polish, whose brutalities became a byword in Lithuania. He was assisted by two other satellites of like temper to himself, and of notorious moral character. For Mickiewicz and his associates there was no hope. With no means of defence except their own wits, having none to plead for them, they were pitted against these men who had the power of the Russian empire behind them, who acted as accusers, judges, and executioners combined, and whom no motive of justice or humanity withheld from securing their desired object. Every measure that ingenuity could suggest was put into force by the Commission to wring from the youthful prisoners acknowledgment of guilt or betrayals of their comrades. Novosiltzov began with a pitiless cross-examination, in which every word uttered by these hapless boys and youths, as each stood alone before his persecutors, without a friend or advocate to say one syllable in his behalf, was wrested and turned against him. From threats and verbal persecution, the Commission passed to the more violent methods of the

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Russian prison. Solitary confinement, poisonous air, putrid food were the lot of some. Others were put for days on a fare of salt herrings and at the same time deprived of anything to drink. Others again were flogged so cruelly that they died under the lash.

From the beginning, Thomas Zan offered himself up as a sacrifice for his followers. He boldly declared that he alone was responsible for the students' associations, and besought the Russian authorities to let the penalty fall upon his head and to set his companions free. In this, the hour of their ordeal, his bands stood steadfast. Not one betrayed his brother. Shoulder to shoulder, they presented a dauntless front to the enemy, and maintained an unswerving loyalty to each other ; but at what a cost ! The sufferings of one of these youths drove his mother out of her mind. Another of the prisoners could bear his misery no longer, and cut his throat. A third flung himself from his window. Young boys, including children not older than twelve years, were sent in chains to the mines. Sons of the oldest houses in the land were condemned to serve in the ranks of the Russian army : young Plater and the schoolboys who had written with him on the slate paid for the deed by being enrolled as Russian privates. The noblest spirits were exiled to Siberia, to distant provinces of Russia, or drafted into the Russian garrisons in Asia. All over Lithuania, schools were closed by the Russian Government, and the boys attending them declared officially as civilly dead, cut off from every profession, debarred from entering any other educational establishments, either public or private.

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How deeply the incidents of his prison life were branded into Mickiewicz's soul we see in those scenes describing them in his *Ancestors*, written with his heart's blood, and with so strong and tragic a fidelity to facts that, many years after, one who had been his companion in the prison declared that as he read the drama it seemed to him as though he himself had written it. But during the actual six months of his imprisonment, Mickiewicz could not write.¹ He was harassed by the suspense of his own fate and that of his friends. His faculties were strained to their sharpest to parry the inquisitions of the Russian Commission. For the first time in his life, he was face to face with an unscrupulous and cruel enemy, and was called to protect himself against pitfalls spread for him in their every question.² "Where did you learn your love of your country?" Zan was asked: and perhaps for all his danger the Pole may have been tempted to smile as, instead of disclosing some name that the judges hoped to hear, he replied: "On the benches of the class-room from Kopczynski's Grammar, which says: 'We are not born for ourselves. One part of us belongs to our country, the other to our friends.'" The baffled inquisitors were obliged to satisfy themselves by destroying every copy of Kopczynski's Grammar upon which they could lay their hands.

Oppressed by the bitterness of his captivity, in harrowing anxiety as to what lay before him, Mickiewicz was determined to remain true to his ideals. When

¹ With the exception of one short poem that is practically only a paraphrase of Jean Paul, of whom Mickiewicz read much while in prison.

² J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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he was not being examined before the Commission he passed his days in solitude, reading. In the evenings, the young men managed to elude the guard—perhaps connived at by the good-will of some Pole on duty as in the famous scene of *The Ancestors*—and they spent a great part of the night together in one of their cells. It was then that they arranged with each other the lines of their defence when called upon to appear before Novosiltzov : but, besides, the conversation must often have turned upon the tragedies by which they were surrounded. That was the time for any of the prisoners who had gone to his trial during the day to relate whatever news he had managed to pick up on the way ; and too often he brought back sad tales of the fate of the friends and brothers of those listening to his words. They would talk till dawn, or, till the alarm being given of the guard coming on their rounds, they hurriedly extinguished their lights and each escaped to his own cell. Yet even in the gloom of a prison these gatherings were not unhappy. One of their number—the gallant light-hearted Frejend of *The Ancestors*—would make tea for the company, amuse them by his jokes, or play upon his flute. One night—it was Christmas Eve—they were assembled in Adam's cell. They heard to the distant rolling of the organ in some church hard by the sounds of the Polish Christmas carols which, says Ignacy Domeyko, Mickiewicz's friend and fellow-prisoner, “transported us to our own firesides where our mothers and sisters were weeping for us.”¹ It was that Christmas Eve meeting in the prison which

¹ Ignacy Domeyko, *The Philaretians and Philomathians* (Polish), quoted by Mr. Ladislas Mickiewicz in his *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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Mickiewicz chose as the background for his Konrad's agony and despair.

For, although Mickiewicz was silent during the long days of his imprisonment, we must not forget that they gave Polish literature Part III. of *The Ancestors*, and with Part III., Konrad's magnificent, soul-stirring *Improvisation*, that great cry of a race in bondage, the highest point that even the genius of Mickiewicz ever touched. It was what Mickiewicz had undergone in the Basilian convent that years later drew that wonderful piece of writing from his heart. He, indeed, owed much to his prison walls. There he found his soul and his vocation. His earthly love was stamped out, and on its ashes rose the phœnix of the noble passion to which his life was henceforth consecrated. He left the prison as one who, passing through great spiritual exercise, emerges with a fresh birth in his soul.¹ In one of those pathetic letters that, long afterwards, he wrote to his young wife in her madhouse, he reminded her that he, too, had known what it was to be in durance, and that he had found it a sharp but salutary cure.

Mickiewicz had already shown a gift for improvisation that later aroused the admiring wonder of everyone who heard him. In the prison, this faculty developed. One of the best of his earlier improvisations took place in Zan's cell. Jan Czeczot, whom in *The Ancestors* Adam christens Adolf, sang one night a mournful Polish folk-song, and Mickiewicz, inspired, rose and improvised. All his life Mickiewicz was passionately fond of music, and so sensitive was he to

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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its influence that his whole face seemed to change as he listened. Dating from this improvisation in the prison, he henceforth improvised, for the most part, only to music.

The poet was released in April, 1824, through the influence at headquarters of the famous Polish historian, Lelewel. For the next six months he was detained at Wilna, awaiting the Tsar's final sentence. The uncertainty of his doom robbed him of poetical inspiration in any enduring form. He only tossed off a few verses here and there, and improvised in the houses of his friends.

Then the blow fell. In October, 1824, Mickiewicz received his sentence of banishment to Russia. That was a month of mourning in Lithuania, sons bidding their weeping mothers an eternal farewell.¹ Zan and Czeczot, deported first of all to Orenburg, then to Siberia, left Wilna before Mickiewicz. When Mickiewicz parted with them, never to meet them again on earth, he gave the beloved friend who had so nobly directed his youth his copy of Thomas à Kempis, scored with pencil-notes in his own hand, which Zan carried with him to Siberia.

As many of the Philomathians and Philaretians as could be mustered together met for a last banquet the night before Adam started for Russia. Each one showed a gallant front, and the gathering went off gaily. They sang the songs of the brotherhood, and Mickiewicz, at the general request, improvised, accompanied by Frejend's flute. The next morning, Mickiewicz, although the attitude of his mind was at this period of his life tending to religious indifference, heard Mass. He knelt all the time with his face

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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buried in his hands. Those who saw him during these last hours noticed his deadly pallor, no less than his resolute calm. His parting words to the comrades with whom he had shared the ideals of his young manhood, and by whose side he had striven to realise them, were of faith in Providence and of man's obligation to yield with perfect trust to its orderings: a moral that Mickiewicz carried out unflinchingly throughout his own life. Frejend, Domeyko, and two other fast friends, followed the carriage that bore Adam as far as they could, waving their hats and handkerchiefs till he was lost to their sight. To one of these young men—Edward Odyniec—the little bells ringing at the heads of Mickiewicz's horses as the signal was given to depart seemed the funeral knell that severed him from the companion that he loved.¹

Thus was dispersed that band of generous youths, famous in Polish history.

"We met again," writes Domeyko, "though not all of us. We met no more for country rambles or for our séances, but over our swords and at the national Rising. Not all survived the ruin of the cause. Those who remained went into exile: and of these some returned again to seek death in their country, others died on foreign earth. Only a few did Providence permit to fall asleep peacefully in their father's house. Let eternal light shine upon them all," adds he piously, "till they awaken at God's voice."²

¹ Edward Odyniec, *Recollections of the Past* (Polish), from Mr. L. Mickiewicz's *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² Ignacy Domeyko, *The Philarétians and Philomathians*, from Mr. L. Mickiewicz's *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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It was on the 24th of October 1824, that Mickiewicz left the country that he was never to see again, but which was to haunt his life and dreams with a passionate and yearning love, with a never-ending sense of loss. He set out for Russia with the curiosity of an explorer about to enter the domains of his deadly enemy. Those first impressions are recorded in a short series of poems written after he had left Russia, and originally intended as a sort of interlude between the third part of *The Ancestors* and that projected continuation which never saw the light.

The *Road to Russia*, a fine piece of descriptive writing, transports the reader to the snowy unbroken Russian plain through which the poet's sledge rushed as the wind in the desert. There roar icy blasts, lashing the wastes into a heaving sea of snow.

"Desolate, white, wide open land, waiting like a blank page to be written on. Will God's finger write thereon, using for His signs men of good-will? Will He trace here that holy truth that love must govern the human family and that the triumphs of the world are in self-sacrifice? Or will the old enemy of God arrive instead, and engrave out with the sword that mankind must be bound in chains and that the triumphs of humanity are in the knout?"¹

The next five years of his life Mickiewicz spent between Petersburg, Odessa, and Moscow, a sort of prisoner at large, closely watched by the Russian police. The chief companion of these years was his fellow-Philomathian, young Francis Malewski, with whom he lived as a brother, and who afterwards distinguished himself by his scientific labours.

¹ Adam Mickiewicz, *The Road to Russia*.

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Mickiewicz arrived in Petersburg, which was his first halting-place, determined to fulfil unswerving the ideals of the Philomathian brotherhood. But at the same time the canker-worm of bitterness, born of the injustice that had darkened and in many cases ruined the lives of himself and of his dearest friends, had begun to eat into his soul. At this critical moment he fell under a spiritual influence that wrought far-reaching results over his subsequent life and work. The Polish artist, Oleszkiewicz, was then living in Petersburg, and he at once took Adam to his heart. This gentle mystic, in the centre of Tsardom itself, spoke to the young poet, who was smarting under the sense of the wrong he had seen and suffered, of love for the enemies of his country. He told him that the only way to salvation lay in that love and in forgiveness of those who had injured Poland. He talked earnestly of a living faith in the things of the unseen world. Mickiewicz conceived the strongest affection and veneration for this man. It was, however, his wont during his youth to conceal his spiritual troubles and to parry the apostolic efforts of his friends by turning them off with a joke. But the eyes of the painter-mystic that had gazed deeply into the life beyond human vision penetrated to the hidden places of Adam's soul. "Like Jacob, you struggle against the spirit," he said one day, "but in vain. You are a chosen vessel, and sooner or later grace will fill you, and from you flow to others." Mickiewicz never forgot those words. Although after he left Petersburg the effects of his conversations with the Polish mystic were considerably weakened by the influences

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of the Russian salons that he frequented and by his intimacy with Russian free-thinkers, yet it was Oleszkie-wicz who prepared the way for that light of faith and love which was to illuminate Mickiewicz's troubled road on earth. He lives in Polish literature as the Capuchin in *The Ancestors*, whose charity saves Konrad's soul.

The life that Mickiewicz and his fellow-Philomathians led in Russia was one of strange and abnormal conditions. Surrounded by the pageantry of the conquering Tsar, with alien and hostile gaze these young men looked on at the triumphs of their bitterest enemy. They were under the close surveillance of the police. Their correspondence was watched. They were constrained to express themselves with considerable caution in those letters that passed through the public post ; and they eagerly seized every opportunity of sending packets to their families and friends through a private hand. Spies dogged them, and poisoned their Russian friendships. In public places, over the tables in the restaurants, they lowered their voices for fear of the eavesdroppers lurking in every corner. Sent from town to town at the pleasure of the Government, they lived in uncertainty from day to day where the next hour might see them : and now began for Mickiewicz his life-long pilgrimage, when the insecurity of the morrow taught him that for the Polish exile there was no abiding city.

But even in police-ridden and fettered Russia, Mickiewicz's life, albeit often darkened for days by inevitable and bitter regrets, knew many happy

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moments. Everywhere, proscribed Pole though he was, he captivated all hearts. He found himself in the novel position of being an honoured guest in the houses of the fashionable world. Mickiewicz lived in Russia when a great movement in her literature was taking place, and when a wave of political aspiration, a yearning for freedom and a happier age, had taken possession of the minds of her best thinkers. The Russian Liberals and poets became his friends, or, rather, loved him as a brother. He was on terms of affectionate intimacy with Pushkin, Bestúzhev, and Ruilyéev. With anguish of heart, he saw the two latter swept away by the terrible fate that overtook them. With greater pain, he lived to see Pushkin turn aside from the higher path.

Among these diverse conditions of men and women; whether surrounded by the brilliant society of the salons where, first of all, he found himself very ill at ease but in which, with his innate simplicity of character and tranquil bearing, he soon ceased to feel a stranger; or at the meetings of the Russian poets and writers, when he dreamed with them of a Utopian future for the human race; the pale, dark-haired young Pole went his way, his face even in the most festal scenes always sad and thoughtful, save when it was lit up by a smile so sweet that a Russian friend described it as the very embodiment of an ideal goodness of heart.¹ No matter in whose company he found himself or where he chanced to be, his was always the same

¹ It is noteworthy that Mme. Gorecka, Mickiewicz's eldest daughter, has recorded her own impressions of her father's winning smile in almost precisely similar terms. M. Gorecka, *Recollections of Adam Mickiewicz* (Polish). Warsaw, 1875.

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simplicity of soul which, united to the extraordinary power of his genius and the large-hearted, generous qualities of the man, aroused an enthusiasm of devotion from those who knew him.¹ Of his own great gifts he seemed unconscious. Jealousy of another poet, belittling another person, speaking evil of the absent, were weaknesses unknown in him. The Russian writer, quoted above, Polevoi, many years after he was separated from Mickiewicz, remembered his friendship with the great Polish poet, as one of the most beautiful possessions of his life. He said that seldom had he met any one who dealt so sweetly and so forbearingly with others as this exiled Pole, living under a rule that was his nation's ruthless oppressor.

"Everyone loved him," he says, "as a man of uncommon spiritual qualities, who attracted others by the loftiness of his views, the wonderful many-sidedness of his knowledge, and by some special goodness of soul, peculiar to himself."²

"He lived among us," sang Pushkin, when he and Mickiewicz were parted asunder, not by distance or years alone, for Mickiewicz ever held the memory of his other Russian friends dear even when he was obliged by national circumstances to break off all intercourse with them, but by Pushkin's own changed attitude to Poland in the hour of her greatest suffering "he lived among us, among an alien race. There was no hatred for us in his soul. We loved him.

¹This was the case all through Mickiewicz's life. A Polish lady who had known him well when a schoolmaster at Kowno still spoke of him thirty years afterwards as her ideal of manhood.

²L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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He shared our banquets. Our purest dreams were never hidden from him ; he knew our songs. Verily he had inspiration from on high. Lofty was his outlook on life. He often talked with us of those future times when nations, laying aside mutual hatred, will be united as one family. Eagerly did we hearken to those words of the poet's. He went to the west, and our blessings accompanied him on the way."¹

All those Russians who were intimate with Mickiewicz note his complete absence of any tinge of that patriotic hatred that he might well have felt towards them. "He speaks to everybody without making any difference between them. He sees only brothers in them all," writes a Russian lady, who goes on to observe how his soul responded to everything that was noble and beautiful.² Mickiewicz was the undying enemy of the Russian Government, and of its barbarous methods and corrupt officialdom. Nor did he ever conceal his opinions from his Russian friends. They all knew that the heart of the man whom they loved was given to oppressed Poland, and that his one hope was her release from servitude. Mickiewicz became, in fact, something like an apostle for his nation among his Russian associates, and gained many of them to sympathy with her wrongs ; but to hate a Russian because he was a Russian was an attitude utterly foreign to his nature. To the end of his life he loved the individual Russian, rather, indeed, to the scandal of some of his brother Poles. In the verses I have cited, Pushkin reproaches the Polish poet, inasmuch that his affection for his Mus-

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

² *Op. cit.*

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covite friends changed with the course of years to open hatred. This accusation is indignantly refuted by Polevoi.¹ Mickiewicz, whose ardent and generous soul was roused to a fire of anger at the sight of unworthy and ignoble deeds, could not by the nature of things endure the thought of those Russians who had contributed to the sufferings of his nation, or who, like Pushkin, had turned against the Poland with whom they had once professed to sympathise.² But even the terrible years following the Rising of 1830—those years when the very name of Russian must have held unspeakable bitterness to the Polish heart—were powerless to stamp out Mickiewicz's tender memories of the companions among whom he had lived in his earliest exile. He never forgot them: and, when his life in Russia lay far behind him, he turns on his road to hail them once again in the beautiful and mournful poem entitled *To My Russian Friends*.

These lines may appropriately be quoted here:—

“Do you remember me? As often as I think upon the death, imprisonment, and exile of my friends, I think of you.

“Where are ye now? The noble neck of Ruil'yéev which as a brother's I embraced, now, by the Tsar's command, hangs on the shameful tree. Cursed be the nation that slays their prophets!

“That hand which Bestúzhev, poet and soldier, stretched to me; that hand, torn from the pen and sword, the Tsar hath harnessed to the convict's barrow, and to-day it toileth in the mines, chained to a Polish hand.”

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² In an article that he published on Pushkin after the latter's death, Mickiewicz, however, expressed the opinion that this phase in the Russian poet's opinions was only transitory, and that Pushkin in his last days showed signs of returning to his old and higher ideas.

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Then, across the sea of Poland's tears that had rolled between him and the past, the poet pours out a lamentation sadder still for those whom—

“Perchance Heaven has stricken with a heavier punishment. Perchance some one among you, branded with an office or an honour, hath bartered his free soul for ever for the favour of the Tsar, and to-day is cringing at the threshold of his palace.

“Perchance with salaried tongue he praises the Tsar's triumphs, and rejoices at the torments of his friends. Perchance that in my country he is crimsoned with my blood, and boasts of his cursed work as a service to the Tsar.

“If to you from afar, from the nations that are free, these songs of grief shall wing their way even to the North, and shall ring on high above the land of ice, may they be your harbingers of freedom, as the cranes foretell the spring !

“Ye will know me by my voice ! While I was in chains, I deceived the despot, crawling silent like a snake ; but to you I did not hide the secrets of my heart, and with you I ever had the dove's simplicity.

“Now upon the world this cup of poison I pour forth, burning and devouring with the bitterness of speech—bitterness sucked out from my country's blood and tears. Let it slay, let it burn your chains, but not yourselves.”

Thanks to the efforts of his influential Russian friends, Mickiewicz was not banished to any solitary and remote provincial town. Petersburg, Odessa, and Moscow were, as we have already said, the scenes of his stay in Russia. Each of these three cities introduced him to a different aspect of life. During his first sojourn in the capital he was surrounded by the Russian Liberals and poets. There, too, he and his friend Malewski became exceedingly intimate in the family of a Polish pianist, Marya

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Szymanowska. This lady threw open her doors to all the exiled Philomathians, and the lonely youths found in her rooms a second home. Adam and Malewski were treated as the sons of the house, and now and then would play a practical joke to amuse the girls and their mother. Once Mickiewicz and some of his friends got up an impromptu concert for the ladies' benefit. Francis Malewski improvised a triumphal march on the piano, while Mickiewicz, whose musical attainments, although music was one of his greatest joys, never reached beyond the limits of a low sort of hum, accompanied his friend on the bass-viol, and some other young Poles made equally merry over any instrument they could manage to hunt up. One of the Szymanowska daughters—Celina—who was then scarcely more than a lively child, Adam loved to tease, acting the part of a half-humorous mentor towards her. In future years this girl was to become his wife, and Malewski, in his turn, married Helena, the elder sister. The history of Adam Mickiewicz is so tragic, so many and grievous were the sorrows through which he passed, that it is pleasant to catch a glimpse of him in these lighter moments. It was life that saddened him, not his own disposition. His natural temperament had been a gay one.

Odessa, where Mickiewicz lived from the February of 1825 to the November of that same year, saw the poet plunged into the frivolous world of the cosmopolitan salons. It was at this period—a brief one—of his career that Adam fell most below his old ideals. As we have seen, he was a man possessed of great

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attractions, and in Odessa he had a love affair with a married woman. Soirées, entertainments, dances, filled his time, and to a certain extent turned his thoughts from the nobler subjects with which they had been occupied in Poland. He paid for these intervals of distraction by days of heavy sadness and bitter yearning for all that he had lost with his country. A friend who had not seen him since they had known each other last in Lithuania, and who now came across him again, was startled by his changed aspect, by the traces of deep suffering that he carried on him.

Towards the end of his stay in Odessa, Adam obtained permission from the Government to take a short tour in the Crimea. How powerfully his imagination was captivated by that southern land with its blue skies and luxurious vegetation, its flower-covered steppes and Oriental ruins, may be seen in the exquisite pictures that he has consecrated to its memory. The *Crimean Sonnets* mark an epoch in Mickiewicz's literary history, for here he shows himself for the first time as the poet who painted Nature from the heart of the lover, with the delicate colouring of the artist. To Mickiewicz every aspect of Nature was dear and intimate. The frowning mountain-gorge, through which his Tartar guide conducted him, storms and calm at sea, the faint rustle of the butterfly in the grass, the beating of the crane's wings in the silence of the steppe—all these are found on his canvas depicted with the same minute and poetic touch. I will give a rough rendering of two of the Sonnets. Inadequate as is my version to convey any satisfactory

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idea of the beauty of the original, it may illustrate the great Polish poet's close observation of Nature; and I would fain express the wish that a competent hand will some day give the English reader a translation of the whole cycle, eighteen in number, that will do justice to these delicious poems.

“ALUSHTA BY DAY

“Now doth the mountain shake her veil of mist from her bosom. Her golden-haired summit murmurs a morning prayer. The forest, bowing its head, sheds, from its tresses green, rubies and garnets like a Caliph's rosary beads.

“The mead is all flowers, and over the mead float flying flowers, butterflies, many-hued, that like a rainbow ringlet have hidden the sky with a canopy fashioned of diamonds. Far off the locust stretches his winged shroud.

“And where the bald-scared rock looks at his face in the water, there the sea boils, and, repulsed, rides in again in a new assault. Light plays in its foam as it plays in the eyes of a tiger,

“Announcing a mightier storm for this strip of the earth. And on the deep lightly a wave is rocking, and on it bathe fleets and armies of swans.”

“THE STEPPES OF AKERMAN

“I have entered the wide waste of a waterless sea. The carriage dives in an ocean of green, where, like a boat, a passage it cleaves. 'Midst the waves of the murmuring meads, 'midst a river of flowers, I pass by coralline islets of bushes in flower.¹

¹ In his own note to this passage, Mickiewicz explains that the word *burzan*, peculiar to the steppes, which I have translated as *bush in flower*, is “a great bush which, covered in the summer with flowers, agreeably breaks the monotony of the plains.”

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“Already the night falls fast. There is nowhere a road or knoll. I look to the sky and seek for a guiding star. There, far off, glitters a cloud, there rises the star of dawn. There the Dniester glitters, there the lights of Akerman shine !

“Halt ! Ah, how still ! I hear the flight of cranes, which even the eyes of the hawk cannot reach ; I hear where the butterfly rocks in the grass ;

“Where the snake with its slippery breast lightly brushes a plant. In such a hush so eagerly I strain my ears that I might hear even a voice from Lithuania. . . . Let us ride on, no one calls.”

The sorrow of the exile, that torture of Mickiewicz’s whole life, had already begun to eat into his soul. It casts its shadow over these wanderings in the Crimea. When he gazes down from the heights upon a tranquil sea sleeping at his feet, and sees the ships gently swaying to and fro, with their sails “dreaming on the bare masts like flags when the war is over,” he remembers that among the living creatures of the sea there is a

“polypus, that at the bottom sleeps when the sky is overcast with clouds, but in the calm unwreathes long arms. Oh human mind ! in thy depths is the Hydra of memory that sleeps in the midst of evil fate and passionate storms, but when the heart is at rest, fastens its fangs therein.”

Amidst the nightingales of the East it is the murmurs of his own Northern forests that are sounding in his ears, the marshes of his lost Lithuania, her greyer skies, for which his soul pines beneath a Southern sun. The stars that shine down on the grave of a lady of the Potocki family, dead in Tartar captivity, point the way to the North, to Poland, whither her eyes, no less than his, turned with eternal longing,

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and which neither he nor she, both alike to die among aliens, might ever see again. Dr. Kallenbach has observed that these Sonnets, inspired though they are by the East, are not Oriental in character. They contain too much of the poet's own personality.

After nine months in Odessa, Mickiewicz moved on to Moscow, in November, 1825. There he lived for two years in close friendship with Russian writers, journalists, and artists, and, despite his poverty, went much into society. This line of conduct roused the disapproval of Jan Czeczot, himself the austerest of men who, like Thomas Zan, became almost a religious ascetic before he died.¹ He wrote to Mickiewicz, reproaching him for the wrong that he did his country in seeking amusement for himself while she suffered—amusement, moreover, among her enemies. Czeczot avoided all social intercourse with Russians. Zan, on his side, continued his labours for the good of his fellow-men by endeavouring to implant in the souls of the Russian children whom he taught those same virtues to which he had guided his young countrymen. Mickiewicz replied in a joint letter to Zan and to Czeczot that it did not behove the Pole to show his love for his country either by standing on the highway like a Don Quixote, challenging each passer-by, or by retiring to the desert.

“*My JANKO!*”—the Polish diminutive for *Jan*—“Is it not possible to join and bind to that high

¹ Letter of Edward Odyniec, given by Lucyan Siemieniski in his *Religion and Mysticism in the Life and Poetry of Adam Mickiewicz* (Polish). Cracow, 1871.

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and noble love trifles that signify nothing? Can dinners, dances, songs, hurt that divine beloved one [Poland]? ”¹

Adam always remained on terms of devoted affection with these two high-minded men. He sent Zan books to solace his dreary exile, and, after *Konrad Wallenrod* had been published, he handed a large part of the proceeds, ill as he could spare it, to Zan and Czeczot.²

In Moscow, Mickiewicz seems to have returned to his higher self. . He lived with Francis Malewski, each linked to the other by a brother's love. Several of his old Polish comrades were in the city, and the joy that these youths experienced in being once more thrown together sweetened their exile. Zan's disciples, through heavy trials, had stood firm to their guns, and among them Mickiewicz found his soul again. But apart from this renewed companionship with his beloved Polish colleagues, and albeit that some of his dearest Russian intimacies were formed in Moscow, the circumstances of Mickiewicz's life in that town were such as to fill his soul with sadness. While there, he heard that the first friends that he had made in Russia—the Decembrists whom, as we have seen, he commemorated in his poem *To My Russian Friends*—had perished on the gallows or had been condemned to the

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz* (Polish). Letter to Jan Czeczot and Thomas Zan, January 5th, 1827.

² Mickiewicz was always exceedingly generous in the financial assistance he gave both his friends and his brother out of his own poverty. When he himself had nothing to depend upon except on what his literary work brought him, he offered his brother the whole copyright of one of his books.

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mines in Siberia. Since the discovery of the plot, the vigilance of the Government had been redoubled. Mickiewicz's friends in Russia were among the suspected, and all private letters were so closely scrutinised that the poet's intercourse with his new comrades, his correspondence and that of his Polish companions, could only be carried on with the utmost precautions. He himself was nearly sent off by the Government to a distant Russian outpost, but the intercession of some powerful Russian friends saved him from this trial. His hope of ever seeing his country now died. But he would not let his heart fail him. He intended to be stronger than his circumstances.¹

The galling conditions under which he lived in Russia cramped the direction of his poetical genius, but could not silence it. As long as he brought out his work under the rigorous Russian censorship, he sang as a soul in fetters. We cannot look yet for the Titan cries of agony that he will pour forth in the hour of his freedom, such as the magnificent grief of his second *Konrad*, or the despairing plaint of his lines *To The Polish Mother*. But, nevertheless, these years of exile in Russia was a time of high literary inspiration. It was then that he produced some of his best-known poetical creations : the *Crimean Sonnets*, as we have seen, the famous *Konrad Wallenrod*, published in 1828, and *Faris*.

Konrad Wallenrod is pre-eminently the song of Mickiewicz's bondage.

Who can wonder if he spoke out of the bitterness

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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of his heart? He was an exile, exposed to that heavy moral ordeal which the Pole must bear, namely, to carry in his soul the rankling sting of the injustice of his fate. He was watched, spied, suspected. Whatever the ties of friendship that bound him to the individual Russian, he and his fellow-exiles were aliens, surrounded by a system that they loathed, at the mercy of a Government that was their country's implacable enemy. The friends and companions of his young manhood, as generous, as pure in their ideals as himself, were in the mines, in Siberia, in banishment. Before his eyes were the portents of the storm that in 1830 was to sweep down upon his beloved native land.

Under these circumstances, he wrote the epic which he headed with a significant motto adapted from Machiavelli :

“ You must know that there are two ways of fighting. It is necessary to be both a fox and a lion.”

(“ *Dovete adunque sapere come sono due generazioni da combattere —bisogna essere volpe e leone.* ”)¹

He cast the poem under the shape of the long struggle, so dear to the Lithuanian memory, between the Teutonic knights and the wild children of Lithuania, clad in bearskins, armed with bows and javelins, courageous and undaunted as the wild beasts of their own primeval forests. Among the military monks appears a mysterious stranger, who bears the name of Konrad Wallenrod. No one knows whence he springs. Only one grey-haired monk, Halban, his

¹ Cf. *Il Principe*, cap. xviii.

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faithful companion, is in his confidence. None other can tell the reason of his brooding gloom or of the deep signs of suffering on his proud and cold face: of the sadness of his songs: of the isolation in which he envelops himself: or of his sudden transports of rage, like the lion in the toils. But his feats of arms in the wars carried on by the knights, and his prowess in the tournament, are famous; and he is elected as the Grand Master of the Order.

When, instead of leading his troops to war, he suffers the Lithuanians to harry unmolested the neighbourhood of their once dreaded foe, we begin to suspect his secret. The mystery unfolds itself further as, under the cover of the night, he haunts a tower whence issues the voice of a woman, whose face we never see, but with whom he exchanges words of passionate love and loss. It becomes apparent that for the sake of an unhappy country he has torn himself from her life somewhere in a far past, and that now the struggle between love of her and of a great cause of vengeance is rending his heart in two. And all is made clear to the reader when at a feast held by the knights, a Lithuanian minstrel—in reality, Halban in disguise—enters and sings in mournful strains the tale of a Lithuanian boy who, brought up in German captivity, escapes to his own people: and, later, tearing from his heart the love of bride, home, friends, returns in disguise to the land of his hatred to work his country's salvation. Then we know that we are listening to Konrad's own history.

This song of the minstrel is famous as a splendid

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plea for romantic art and for national tradition.¹ To those who would penetrate into Mickiewicz's soul, it possesses a peculiar pathos as being the lament of the captive and the exile, written by the captive and the exile himself, gazing towards his lost country with eyes that are dimmed with tears. Do we not hear Mickiewicz's own voice as the singer, lonely in the brilliant banquet, stands alone, lyre in hand, among his nation's relentless enemies?

“None, none was there to bring me any aid, when from the altar I, the aged minstrel, was dragged to languish in the German's chains. Alone, in a strange land, my hair grew white. Alas ! the singer had none to whom to sing. Gazing to Lithuania, I wept my eyes away. To-day, if I would fain sigh for my home of old, I know not where may be the home I loved, if there, or yonder, or in some other place. Here only in my heart hath taken refuge all that was dearest in my native land.””

This is the introduction to the celebrated apotheosis of a people's oral traditions :—

“Oh, people's song ! Thou art the ark of the covenant betwixt the old and the younger years. Ark that no blow may break as long as thine own nation does not despise thee. Oh, people's song, thou standest as the guardian sentinel of the memories of the national Church, with an archangel's voice and wings.

“Fire will devour painted histories, and riches will fall to the swords of robbers. Song will escape from all and will range among the crowds of men. And if mean souls know not how to feed her with grief or water her with hope, she

¹ Mickiewicz, it must be remembered, was one of the pioneers in the great romantic revival of Polish literature ; and, at the time that he first began to write, the struggle between the Classic and Romantic schools was in its death throes.

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will flee to the mountains, she will cling to old ruins, and tell the story thence of ancient times. So flies the nightingale from a burning house, and, sitting for a moment on the roof, when the roof falls, she flies to the woods, and, from her vibrating breast above the smouldering wastes and tombs, sings to the passer-by a song of grief.¹

“‘ As in the day of judgment, the archangel’s trumpet will call the dead past from the tomb, so at the sound of song the bones beneath my feet have gathered together and grown into mighty forms. Pillars and roofs rise from their ruins, desolate lakes throb with the sound of oars, and you may see gates of castles flung wide, and glittering crowns of princes, and warriors’ trappings. The minstrels sing, and groups of maidens dance. I dreamt of wondrous things—I was awakened rudely.

“‘ Gone are my native hills and woods ! My wearied mind sinks on its drooping wings, and takes its refuge on the hearth of home. My lyre is silent in my cold stiff hand. Among the sorrow-stricken sighs of my own countrymen, often I cannot catch the voices of the past.

“‘ Oh, if I could but pour my fire into the hearts of those who hear me, and awaken to life the figures of the dead past : if I could but transfix my brothers’ hearts with sounding words : they might in that one moment, moved by their native song, feel in themselves their hearts beat as of old, feel in themselves the ancient grandeur of the soul, and live one moment as sublimely as their forefathers once lived all their lives.’”

Then the minstrel tells the story of the Lithuanian boy-prisoner who is, of course, Konrad himself, and from which we give those passages which illustrate Mickiewicz’s yearning for his country and his own sense of isolation among her enemies. We must never forget that the grief of his exile was one of

¹ The simile of the nightingale is one of Mickiewicz’s much-quoted passages.

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Mickiewicz's master passions, and so deeply did it affect all his life and his life's work that it cannot be insisted on too strongly or cited too often if we would understand him aright. . Moreover, this episode of a boy torn from his native land and brought up by his conquerors, who would fain drive its memory and its love from his heart, was to the Poles of Mickiewicz's times no incident of a distant past, but a matter that touched them only too closely.

The Lithuanian youth, then, having escaped to his countrymen, tells the prince that he does not know either his own name or that of his family, for since childhood he has lived in German captivity. All he remembers is the hills on which his home stood, the woods and lake around it. Then at night the German warriors break into the house: and he has a recollection of a blaze of fire, and of his mother's shriek as he was carried off on one of the enemy's horses.

"I know not what happened after. Only I long, long heard my mother's shriek. In the midst of the clashing of arms, the crash of falling houses, that shriek long followed me, that shriek rang in my ears. Even now, when I see a fire and hear a cry, that shriek wakes in my soul again. That is all that I brought from Lithuania, from my parents. Sometimes in my dreams I see the dear forms of my mother and father and brothers: but each time they are farther off, a mist ever deeper, ever darker, shrouds their features. The years of my childhood passed on, I lived as a German among Germans. My name was German, my Lithuanian soul remained, and there remained my grief for my family, my hatred to the aliens. . . . With the Germans there was a Lithuanian minstrel, taken prisoner years ago. When he heard from me that I was an orphan and a Lithuanian, he often lured me to his side, he talked of Lithuania, my

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yearning soul he strengthened with the music of my native language and with song. Often he led me to the banks of the grey Niemen, whence I loved to gaze towards the dear hills of my native land. When we returned to the castle, the old man dried my tears not to arouse suspicion. He dried my tears, and enkindled in my heart vengeance against the German. . . . Later, in the years of my youth, I often went with the old man in a boat down to the Lithuanian shores. I plucked my native flowers, and their enchanting scent breathed to my soul some old and dim remembrance. Inebriate with that scent, I was a child once more, playing with my little brothers in the garden of my fathers.'"

Taught by the minstrel that he is "a slave, and the only weapon of the slave is treachery," the youth devotes his time to learning the art of war from the Teutonic knights, and escapes during a battle to his country. When he leaves it again it is to turn against his enemies the same weapons they have taught him how to use.

This is Konrad's history up to the point which we have reached. After listening at the banquet to the tale of his own life, which only he of all the audience understands, he plays his move. He leads the knights into the fastnesses of Lithuania. Those left behind watch the horizon redden with the fires of burning homesteads. Then the storms of winter sweep over the land, and still the warriors do not return. At last, a band of broken fugitives straggle back through the snow, all that is left of the glittering warlike army that went forth sure of victory. It is Konrad who has betrayed them. He is condemned to death by the Order ; but he frustrates the penalty by drinking a cup of poison.

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“‘Gaze,’” (cries he, triumphant in his vengeance, with his last breath hurling defiance to his foes). “‘Gaze on the thousands who have perished, on towns in ruins, on homes in flames. Hear ye the roar of the wind? It drives before it clouds of snow! The remnants of your ranks freeze there. Hear ye the howling of the troops of hungry dogs? They quarrel for the fragments of the feast. This is my doing, and I glory in it. I shake the pillar like Samson, the building falls, I perish in the fall!’

“‘I will live,’” (says the faithful Halban), “‘to keep the glory of thy deed before the eyes of the world, to proclaim it to the ages. I will spread it through the hamlets, the castles, the towns of Lithuania, and whither I cannot hasten my song will fly. It will be as a bard to the knight in war, the mother will sing of it to her child. She will sing; and some day in the future from this song will arise the avenger of our bones.’”

Such is the substance of this famous poem, extraordinary from the fact that it was written and published by the captive in the very heart of his enemy’s country. Incredible as it may appear, the Russian censor passed it, after some difficulties on account of Mickiewicz being a suspected subject. It was not till a year later that its true bearing was perceived, and then its author was only saved by flight.¹

The moral side of *Konrad Wallenrod* has been a much disputed subject. Is *Konrad Wallenrod* a glorification of hatred and treacherous revenge; a distinct

¹ As an instance of the trammels in which Mickiewicz’s work was bound in Russia, the censor forbade the line in *Konrad Wallenrod*: “The only weapon of the slave is treachery;” and this was not inserted in the earliest edition. A sonnet of his was refused publication because it ended thus: “I only know three homages that cannot abase the soul: to God, to parents, to the beloved.” The censor considered that this was a hit at the adulation paid to the Tsar in Russia. (Note to Bibliography in *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz*. Paris, 1870.)

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summons to Mickiewicz's compatriots to take up those deadly weapons which in future years Krasinski, the mystic singer of the *Psalm of Love*, passionately entreated his nation to cast from her with horror if she would see salvation? That Konrad is to a certain extent the coward of conscience is certain.¹ We see, from his farewell to his love before taking his own life, that his heart fails at the sight of what he has done. But it is equally true that he dies with words of wild exultation on his lips for the ruin he has wrought on the conqueror. On the other hand, it is impossible to reconcile what we know of the beauty of Mickiewicz's moral character and his peculiarly lofty ideal of the function of poetry, with the theory that he deliberately urged his countrymen to what would fall little short of moral suicide. It appears probable, as Mr. Zdziechowski observes, that Mickiewicz had no very clear idea himself of the question raised by *Konrad Wallenrod*, but that the poem was written out of his oppressed heart, with no definite purpose or intention.² Konrad, the fettered Samson, the patriot whose heart is bursting with a passion of love for his country, for which he can find no outlet—save one—is the expression of what and how intensely Mickiewicz himself must have suffered as long as he lived in Russia.³ The Konrad of the epic—the first type into which Mickiewicz poured his national feeling—leads the way to the second Konrad of *The Ancestors* who, likewise in the "Samson moment" of his greatest power, is driven by his anguish for his people into a still deeper gulf.

¹ M. Zdziechowski, *Byron and his Age* (Polish). Cracow, 1897.

² *Op. cit.*

³ *Op. cit.*

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The real tragedy of *Konrad Wallenrod* lies in the illustration that it affords of the terrible position of the Polish nation. Konrad recoils at the darkness of his deed. His conscience and his love of his country are pitted against each other.¹ He is goaded to defend his country by means from which the upright soul turns with loathing. Mickiewicz foresaw what might too probably be the fruit of the dragon's teeth, sown by persecution. Thus read, the poem stands as the fiery warning of the comet to victorious Russia.² For—

"Wallenrodism"—the new word, taken in the meaning of enforced falsity of life, came into the Polish language with *Konrad Wallenrod*—"is compulsory," writes Mr. Ladislas Mickiewicz, "for the Pole in Russia. It is compulsory for the unhappy Polish child, whose lips in the schools must blaspheme the country which in his heart he worships. It is compulsory for his parents, who must feign joy as they hang out banners and illuminate their windows while they carry mourning in their souls. It is compulsory for the public, obliged to rise when the band plays: 'God defend the Tsar.' So long as throughout the breadth and length of ancient Poland unending humiliation from the enemy is the Poles' daily bread, so long the curses of *Konrad Wallenrod* will find an echo in Polish souls."³

¹Spasowicz, quoted by M. Zdziechowski, *Byron and his Age*. Cracow, 1897.

²It has been said that one of Mickiewicz's objects in writing *Konrad Wallenrod* was to arouse Russian sympathies for his nation. Spasowicz, cited by Mr. Zdziechowski, *op. cit.*

³L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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But the best proof of what Mickiewicz's compatriots understood to be the moral conveyed by *Konrad Wallenrod* is one that in its practical result speaks for itself. It is a known fact that its influence on the Polish reader was not one that pandered to the bitter temptations that beset the victims of wrong; but that on the contrary the Poles, entering fully into the mind of their greatest poet, and enraptured with the burning love of their country that he sung in noble verse, drew from the poem lessons of a lofty patriotism and of a devoted and pure self-sacrifice. Its vogue was immense. Strangers, passing one another in the streets of Warsaw, would silently and cautiously slip the poem into the hand of the unknown passer-by. It and the *Ode to Youth* are said to have been as the call to arms that inspired the Polish nation to rise in 1830.

Mickiewicz himself never cared much for this poem of his. His literary modesty was at all times one of his chief characteristics, and he was never heard to talk about himself. He acknowledged, however, that *Konrad Wallenrod* contained passages that pleased him. From a literary point of view it aroused the admiration of Pole and Russian alike. It has been translated into all the chief languages of Europe.

By the time that *Konrad Wallenrod* had been published—with no slight difficulty—in 1828, Adam with Malewski was back in Petersburg. Several other Philomathians were there also, and, although they could meet but seldom, Mickiewicz sometimes improvised before them. One who saw and heard him in these closing months of his life in Russia, said

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that when the poet improvised he gave the impression of a man "tortured by the spirit."¹ Mickiewicz was now, as he earnestly hoped, on the eve of casting the dust of Russia from off his feet. The severity of the Government towards the Philomathians had somewhat relaxed in Russia itself, though not in Lithuania, and Mickiewicz had been promised permission to travel abroad. In 1829, he wrote his last poem on Russian soil, *Faris*. In spy-haunted Petersburg, under the shadow of its prison walls, he utters the wild glad cry of the desert—the song of freedom.

Faris was composed to the sounds of a great storm that gave the poet his inspiration. The Bedouin's flight on his fiery steed over untrodden sands, swept by the raving and tameless winds of which he is the conqueror, palpitates with the passionate joy of the soul that bondage could not hold. Birds of prey, the only denizens of the wastes, screaming above his head, cry to him to stay his steps. He leaves them and the clouds behind. The hurricane sweeps down upon the intruder, who is defying his lordship over the desert.

"He roared, and rushed on me in a pyramid shape. When he saw that I was a mortal man and unafraid, he smote the earth in his wrath, he flooded all Araby, and like a griffin clutched me in his talons. He flamed with a breath of fire, he sank on a whirlwind of dust. He flung himself to the clouds, he struck at the earth, he shot up a discharge of sand."

But the Arab wrestles with the storm, and, in the might of his freedom, is the stronger of the two.

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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"I have breathed once more!"—and these are the last lines that Mickiewicz wrote while his soul was still fretted in its chains.—"Proudly I have gazed at the stars; and all the stars with golden eyes, all have gazed at me, for there was none save me on the desert earth. How sweet it is to breathe here with all my lungs! I breathe full breaths! I breathe broad breaths! All the air of Araby is hardly enough for me to breathe. How sweet to gaze here with all my eyes! My eyes have pierced so far, so wide, that they reach further than the far horizon. How sweet to stretch my arms with all their strength! I have stretched friendly arms out to the world, and it is as if I could embrace it from the east unto the west. My keen-edged thought flies to the blue abyss, higher, higher, and higher to the summit of the skies. Like the bee that fastens its sting, and with it buries its heart, so I with my thought have fastened my soul in the skies!"

This concluding passage of *Faris* is the foreshadowing of that glorification of the human mind, and of the faculties of the poet "born a creator," which Mickiewicz developed far more fully in the *Improvisation*. But in the later poem it becomes deep tragedy, whereas *Faris* breathes all of joy. *Faris* is "the song," says Mr. Zdziechowski, "of triumphant youth, the song of triumph and of power."¹

While Mickiewicz was making preparations for his journey, and bidding his friends farewell, the suspicions of the authorities had begun to fall upon *Konrad Wallenrod*. News reached the poet that his passport was to be revoked in consequence. It was only through the kindness of a Russian friend, Prince Galitzin, that Adam was able to escape on board a

¹ M. Zdziechowski, *Byron and his Age*.

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vessel bound for Germany. This was in May, 1829. The delay of a few hours would probably have seen him on his way to Siberia.

"With Adam's departure," wrote young Malewski, who loved him so devotedly, "it is as if my good angel had left me."¹ He was followed by the tears and the undying affection of those who lost him. He had come to Russia as a young writer of brilliant promise. When he left what had been to him the land of bondage, he stood among the great poets of his day.

In a hard school his soul had learned that strength that was to stand him in good stead through the rough ways that were awaiting him.²

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

CHAPTER III

WANDERINGS (1829-1832)

“Jerusalem! Jerusalem! my unhappy land! If to thy suffering I do not consecrate each tear of mine, if I do not embrace thee with the sorrow of a son, then curse me and forget me, Jerusalem, my mother.”—KORNEL UJEJSKI.

MICKIEWICZ now enters, at the age of thirty-one, into the Promised Land of his personal and mental liberty. Henceforth, and for the first time, his genius is free to follow where the spirit leads him. This was the only Promised Land that Mickiewicz, in his life-long exile, was ever to reach. We shall see him gazing in vain towards that passionately-loved country of which he, the mystic-patriot, spoke fondly as “Jerusalem, our Jerusalem.” Even the city of the soul that he won at the cost of years of spiritual wrestling was not his to keep. The greatest poet of a tragic nation, his journey on earth soon became a way of sorrows.

It does not fall within the scope of this book to follow Mickiewicz step by step in his wanderings over the Continent before he settled finally in Paris. Our affair being mainly with the character of the man, the nature of his work and its relation to his country, I shall dwell only on those details in his travels that especially illustrate these points.

When he left Russia in May, 1829, he travelled with Edward Odyniec through Germany on his way to

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Italy and Rome. Wherever he went, it was the same story of his conquest over hearts: every one whom he met on his road through life loved and venerated him, from the most brilliant men and women of Europe to the poor struggling Polish exile.

Halting at Berlin, Mickiewicz was at once surrounded by a band of Polish youths who were living there at the time. Their hearts and Adam's went out reciprocally to each other, and Mickiewicz's interior fire communicated itself to them. He was one of those men who are endowed with a strange and remarkable power over souls: and his influence during the short time that he spent with them brought a new spirit into the lives of these young Poles, a spirit that took visible shape when they went forth to take their share in the Rising.¹ Among them was a boy of twenty-two, named Stefan Garczynski, who heard Mickiewicz improvise, and was deeply impressed by the talk he held with him. Strong in his own conviction that true poetry must be Christian and expressive of a nation's ideals, the great poet begged Stefan to devote himself to national poetry instead of to the German philosophy that he was then studying. Thus young Garczynski felt himself inspired to write. He gave both himself and his lyre to his country. For all his frail health, he fought gallantly in the Rising of 1830, and his war-songs were sung in the Polish camps. Long after Garczynski's death, Mickiewicz, lecturing in the Collège de France, recited with emotion lines that his dead friend had written, using a baggage-waggon

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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on which to write, while Warsaw was being bombarded.

It is interesting to hear that at Weimar Mickiewicz visited Goethe. On a personal acquaintance with the living man whose works he had closely studied in his younger days, Mickiewicz was repelled by the great German's cold egotism; but for his part Goethe conceived a deep admiration for the Polish poet. The sculptor, David d'Angers, was in Weimar when Mickiewicz found his way there. He cast a medallion of Adam's head, and became one of his warm friends and worshippers.

But the chief landmark of Mickiewicz's journeyings, before his steps led him to Paris where most of his exile was spent, was Rome; that Rome which brought him to the crisis of his inner life.

To Rome, "the city of the soul," as Byron says, "the orphans of the heart must turn." By the nature of things, she was bound to cast a more than ordinarily powerful spell over the minds of the great Polish national and mystic poets. They came to her, bereaved, outcasts, wanderers over the face of the earth. With their thoughts consecrated to their beloved country, whose ancient glories had sunk in a sea of blood and tears, and yet in whose arising they never ceased to believe, they had before their eyes the ruins of a dead empire on one side, the sanctuaries of a spiritual empire on the other.

An instructive study might be made of the influence of the Eternal City on Polish letters in the first half of the nineteenth century. Rome transfigured the spiritual life of Adam Mickiewicz. The young

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Krasinski dreamed in the ruins of the Coliseum ; and the child of his fancy took noble shape in the drama of *Irydion* that he sent forth to teach his nation that love only is eternally constructive, and by the weapons of love, and not by those of hatred or revenge, Poland shall rise again. Here, too, came Mickiewicz's devoted friend, Bohdan Zaleski, the "nightingale of Polish literature," as he has been called, into whose verse has passed the wild charm, the mysterious music, of the steppes.¹ Gazing over the flower-strewn, lark-haunted plain of the Campagna, which perhaps transported him to the lost steppes of his boyhood, the sweet mystic singer of the Ukraine foretold the national resurrection, and uttered the prophecy—mournfully ironical in the light of latter-day events—that Poland's sorrows will be as fables of the past in the ears of the grandchildren of his generation.

Mickiewicz spent two winters in Rome, those of 1829-30 and 1830-31. During the first winter, he went much into the brilliant Roman world, and frequented the society of artists and writers. He became intimate with Rome's every stone. He told his daughter once that Rome was the one place in all the world that he knew best after the two Lithuanian towns he had lived in as a boy ; and in the same letter he recalls the profound impression that the Eternal City had made upon the mind of the young man who, brought up in Lithuania, had looked from afar to

¹ Dr. A. Małecki, *Juliusz Słowacki* (Polish). Lemberg, 1901. The term of nightingale was given to Zaleski by Mickiewicz himself.

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Rome as a vision never to be realised.¹ But, unlike Krasinski, he has left no record of the Eternal City in his poems beyond a few album verses that he wrote for Henryka Ankwicz, in which their friendship plays a far larger part than the monuments they visited together, and his poetical dream of the same lady composed after he had left Rome. Yet in a great measure it was Rome that inspired Mickiewicz to write the third part of *The Ancestors*. As he wandered about the Eternal City and meditated upon her memories; as, at the same time, his soul was fighting its way through his spiritual difficulties to the light, he felt himself filled with the desire of composing a great mystical drama on a Christian Prometheus. He never carried out his conception as it first stood, but it merged into his second Konrad, the Polish Prometheus, who, bearing the sorrows of millions in his heart, sank beneath their weight.

On Mickiewicz's own soul the Eternal City left its everlasting imprint.

Even before he had left his country, the religious faith of his childhood had waned—or, rather, its fervour and his fidelity to its practices, for Mickiewicz was never a sceptic or unbeliever. As we have seen, the influences that surrounded him in Russia had not made for his spiritual welfare. But Oleszkiewicz's words had dwelt in his heart, and in Rome his long interior travail ended in peace. Human influences came to play their part in this history of his soul. He made a warm friendship with Henryka Ankwicz and her

¹ Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to Marya Mickiewicz, December 19th, 1851.

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cousin, Marcellina Łempicka. He and Odyniec were almost daily guests at the house of the Ankwickz family, and Mickiewicz visited the sights of Rome in their company. These two girls fasted and prayed for Adam's soul ; and each lives, a fair, haloed figure, in the verses that the poet has left to their memory.¹ *The Ancestors* is to a great extent Mickiewicz's spiritual autobiography, and the part he gives Henryka and Marcellina in certain of its scenes proves how tenderly and with what deep gratitude he remembered all that they had done in his behalf. When, borne down with horror at the sound of his blasphemy Konrad falls unconscious to the ground, the demons rush into his prison to capture their prey. But a voice cries out, bidding them begone, because somewhere prayers are being offered up for the sinner. This episode is the poet's tribute to the prayers of the two Polish girls. Henryka, whose second name was Eva, is the Eva of *The Ancestors*. Although her sweet face looks out but for a brief moment from the play, the pure and innocent maiden, surrounded by angels, and praying for pity's sake for the unknown Lithuanian prisoner, remains as the most winning type in Mickiewicz's very limited gallery of women. Although Mickiewicz never seems to have given his heart to this girl with the passion which he had felt for Marya

¹ For a while Mickiewicz had recourse to his old tactics, and when the girls talked to him of his soul, he answered by jests. Then a curious thing happened. The news of Oleszkiewicz's death reached him, and it was noticed that from that hour he never again joked on any religious subject. (Letter of Edward Odyniec, given by L. Siemienki in his *Religion and Mysticism in the Life and Poetry of Adam Mickiewicz.*)

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Wereszczak, he fell in love with her. This, the second real and the last, love of his life, was of a poetic and spiritual nature. As he was crossing the Splügen on his way into Italy, he had written a farewell poem to Marya, words of passionate longing and bitter reproach.¹

After, in her turn, Eva had left his life, he recorded his love for her too in verse. For, besides her commemoration in *The Ancestors*, and the slight rôle that she plays in *Thaddeus*, of which more later, Mickiewicz has left another poem to her. Dreaming of her one night in Dresden, he woke and wrote out his dream in verse. He sees her with the scent of the Roman roses about her, as he had seen her when they were on the Alban Hills together. Her face was beautiful with the light of Paradise, and, as the poet gazed into her eyes, his soul was filled with an enchantment not of the rude day, irradiated with a joy deep and sacred as though he knelt in church. Then, in her ethereal presence, he remembered all his moments of passion and of sin, and, with a heart rent asunder, feeling himself unworthy of her and of joy and of Heaven, he woke, weeping.

For Marcellina, Adam broke the silence that had

¹ Marya was ever enshrined in Mickiewicz's memory. Even after he had loved Eva, he wrote to Domeyko, who had enclosed a few words of Marya's to Mickiewicz in one of his letters, that at the sight of her writing he wept as he had never wept since the day that he had bidden farewell to Zan and Czezot. "We will never see each other again," he says, "but tell her that she will always have a place in my heart from which no one has ever cast her out, and where no one will ever succeed her." This piece of her handwriting was carefully preserved by Mickiewicz among his papers.

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fallen on him since he left Russia, and which had only been relieved by the poem written on the *Splügen*. He went with the Ankwick family for a few days' tour in the Campagna towns. When in Genzano—that old-world, grass-grown place of pilgrimage—Adam spoke of religious topics with such eloquence that tears rose to Marcellina's eyes. Mickiewicz saw her tears, and he put the poem dedicated to her and which he composed as they journeyed homewards over the Campagna, into her hand after they re-entered Rome. This poem is remarkable not only for its high literary qualities, but also for the intense religious feeling that marks how far the poet had travelled on his soul's journey since he had first turned his face to the Eternal City.¹

“To-day, Christ at His table hath welcomed thee. To-day many an angel enviieth thee. Thou castest down thine eyes where Godhead shines. How dost thou pierce my heart with thy humility! Oh, holy and humble soul! When we, cold sinners, lay our wearied heads to rest, thou kneelest before the Lamb of God, and only dawn hushes thy praying lips. Then, pure and calm as moonlight, thy guardian angel flies to thee. Slowly he spreads the veil of dreams, and, full of tender care and full of joy, he bends embracing thee, even as the mother bends over her sleeping child. If the rays of Eternal Mercy shine forth too brightly from the angel's eyes, and fill the sleeper's soul too full of mirth, the angel gently dims his light, draws down the curtain of the sleeper's dream, and flies to Heaven, carrying thy sighs with him. But, ere he flies away, he lays fresh charms beneath thy pillow, so that his nursling wakes each day with renewed love for God and man. I would count as nought the joys of all my days, if even for one night my dreams could be like thine.”

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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It is evident from these lines, as Dr. Kallenbach has pointed out, that Mickiewicz must have passed through profound religious emotions. The poem illustrates that side of his mind that dwelt much in the land of spirits. Anything in the nature of visions attracted him. At different times, he steeped his soul in Behme, Swedenborg, and Saint-Martin.¹

In 1830, Mickiewicz left Rome to spend the summer months between Italy and Switzerland. Travelling through Switzerland with Odyniec, he met for the first time the future poet, Zygmunt Krasinski. Krasinski, who was in riper years to rise as the great mystic teacher of his people, was then a boy of eighteen, carrying with him a tragedy that had blasted his youth. His father had played a distinguished part in the Polish legions under Napoleon. Since then, he had given himself to the Russian Government, thereby incurring the contempt and hatred of all his nation. Young Zygmunt's position between filial affection and an ardent patriotism became too painful to permit him to remain in Poland. He wandered abroad, his life ruined, his sore heart filled with a passion of love for the country which he might not serve. He was studying in Geneva when he first met the great poet, to whom he stands only second in the history of his nation's literature, and he joined Mickiewicz and Odyniec for a short tour. At first, the sensitive, morbid, highly-gifted boy did not take much to Mickiewicz, and complained that he was cold and gloomy. However, before they had been long together, Krasinski conceived an enthusiastic admiration for Mickiewicz that he never lost. Mickiewicz's

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stores of learning, his knowledge of apparently every book that had ever been written—as said Krasinski—were alone enough to captivate the latter's fancy. But more than that, behind Mickiewicz's tranquil bearing and calm, sad face, young Krasinski discovered the hidden fire, and expressed his conviction that Adam's influence would be of benefit to all his own future life. The older poet, who never allowed himself to be conquered by his sorrows, and who for all his griefs was always a stranger to either morbidity or self-introspection, both of which, through his cruel circumstances, ever ravaged Krasinski's character, tried to impress his ideals on the mind of the young beginner. He urged upon him his conviction that truth only was attractive and beautiful, and that, in the age in which they were called upon to write, a fine style without thought availed nothing. That thought, said Adam earnestly, was everything, and it behoved them always to be seeking the truth, and never to allow themselves to be led astray by mere show.¹ The lives of Mickiewicz and Krasinski crossed each other too seldom to enable them ever to become intimate friends, but Krasinski always watched the great poet from afar with a deep esteem, albeit a time came when he, with many others, mourned for the line that Mickiewicz had followed. Mickiewicz, on his side, ranked Krasinski's play, *The Undivine Comedy*, so highly that he analysed it in no less than four lectures out of one course before a brilliant Parisian audience.

On his way back to Rome, Mickiewicz heard that all was over between him and Henryka, the latter's

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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father refusing to entertain the idea of his daughter making so poor a marriage from a worldly point of view. Mickiewicz returned to Rome. During this, his second, winter in the Eternal City—the winter of 1830-31—Mickiewicz shunned society. He shut himself up in his rooms, and, yielding himself wholly to the deep impression of the Eternal City, he devoted his days to thinking on the things of the soul and putting his mind in order. The short poems that he wrote in Rome all speak of those themes with which his thoughts were filled.¹ The triumph of faith and humility over the human understanding, Christ manifesting Himself to the lowly and refused by the proud and learned, are his favourite topics at this time. But in his *Evening Colloquy* he unveils the secrets of his own soul and, in the solitude and silence of the night, we hear his cry to his Creator, the cry of the wanderer who had returned to his goal through pain and penance. This poem is so valuable from a biographical point of view, that I subjoin some of its lines :—

“To Thee I speak, Whose kingdom is in Heaven and Who yet art a guest in the mean dwelling of my soul. When midnight buries everything in darkness, and only sorrow and repentance watch, I speak to Thee ! I have no words for Thee : but Thy thought heareth every thought of mine. In Heaven Thou art a King, but in my heart Thou hangest on the Cross !

“When to those near me I discovered my sick mind and the cancer of the doubt that gnawed it, the wicked fled from me, the good wept, but turned away their eyes. Oh, great Physician ! Thou, more than all, Thou seest my sickness, and yet Thou dost not loathe me !

¹ They were not published in book form until 1836.

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“When before others I gave forth from my soul’s depths a voice more piercing than the cry of suffering, the voice that thunders eternally in hell’s torments, the voice of my evil conscience : oh, terrible Judge ! Thou didst fan the fires of my evil conscience—and yet Thou heardst me.

“When the children of the world say I am at peace, I hide my storm-tossed soul before their eyes. And only in the night, quietly on Thy bosom I pour the storm that has melted into tears.”

If, throughout this book, I dwell upon the religious side of Mickiewicz’s character, I do so because religion, from the date of his stay in Rome, becomes his life. His whole heart gave itself to his country and his God. Mysticism—that eternal inheritance of the Polish race—is one of the chief factors in the history of Poland’s greatest poet, and the foundation upon which he built his political and national theories.

Although the nostalgia of exile never left Mickiewicz, and he still yearned for the comradeship of the youths in whose brotherhood he had lived, his life in Rome up to the November of 1830 was a happy one. His soul had found rest. For a while, he was relieved from financial difficulties. He had the joy of being with Stefan Garczynski who had followed him to the Eternal City. Of all those many friends whom Adam loved upon this earth, Garczynski became the dearest to his heart. It was in Mickiewicz’s arms that his short life closed : and that early death was to be one of Adam’s deepest griefs. Garczynski had been somewhat smitten by Hegel ; and Mickiewicz’s endless and playful disputes with his friend on the subject did no little good to his own soul by strengthening his convictions. But

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Mickiewicz all his life was "fey." Never, as he himself noticed, did he enjoy a brief breathing spell from his heavy troubles but that the tempest broke upon him with redoubled fury. Those months in Rome were the last of his bright days. On November 29th, 1830, the Rising broke out, and he to whom the sorrows of his nation were as his own never again knew what it was to have a light heart.

Some dark foreboding of the truth seems to have hung over him, for his poem, *To the Polish Mother*, was written before that fatal day. Its exact date is uncertain, but it appears as though it were for the most part composed in the journey that he had taken with Odyniec, some months earlier, on those wonderful shores washed by the Mediterranean between Genoa and Pisa. It is said that the pictures of the Blessed Virgin giving a toy cross to the Divine Child to play with that Mickiewicz often saw during this tour in Italy, gave him one of the motives for the lines that he consecrated to the sorrows of the mothers of his race. He wrote them under the melancholy impression of the death of two Philomathians, the first of the band to die in exile. The lonely passing of the one who had breathed his last in Siberia long haunted him.

"The death of our friends," he wrote to another friend, "woke me from a dream with hope. Will it be our lot merely to sigh for the Jerusalem of our return, and for a life led together once more, while we die one by one?"¹

Apparently shrinking from giving his nation words

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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of such despairing import as those of his poem to the Polish mother, he only showed what he had written of it to Odyniec, until he finished it in Rome: and then it appeared in but too timely a moment two days before the night of November 29th, 1830, when Warsaw rose.

Perhaps no more terrible reproach than that contained in these verses could well be uttered by a son of conquered Poland against the Russia that has striven to ruin morally the unhappy nation subject to her. The poem to the Polish mother is the Pole's arraignment at the bar of Eternal Justice of those who have outraged all that is noble, all that is dear, all that is sacred, to his soul.¹

"Oh, Polish mother ! when from thy son's eyes the light of genius shines, when from his childish brow the noble pride of the Poles of old looks forth :

"When, spurning his band of little playmates, he runs to the old man who will sing to him his nation's songs ; when, with bowed head, he listens to the history of his sires ;

"Oh, Polish mother ! ill are these pastimes for thy son. Kneel thou before the image of the Mother of Dolours, and gaze upon the sword that has transfixed her bleeding heart. With a like blow the foe shall pierce thy bosom.

"Because though peace shall gladden all the world ; though nations, rulers, minds shall be at one ; thy son is called to battle without glory, and to a martyrdom—that has no resurrection.

"Then bid him early choose for his musing-place a lonely

¹ "Je ne crois pas qu'il y ait dans aucune littérature quelque chose d'aussi déchirant, d'aussi terrible que la poésie qui a pour titre : *A la mère polonaise*. Chaque fois que j'ai relu cette pièce, je me suis senti pâle à mourir" (Gabriel Sarrazin, *Les Grands Poètes Romantiques de la Pologne*).

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cave where, stretched on the rough earth, he may breathe the wet and rotten air, and share his couch with noxious reptiles.

"There shall he learn to hide his anger with himself beneath the earth, to make his thought impenetrable as a deep abyss; to poison speech, and cringe like unto the slimy snake.

"Our Saviour, when a child at Nazareth, played with the little cross on which He saved the world. Oh, Polish mother! I would fain amuse thy child with his future toys.

"So must thou early wreath his little hands with chains and harness him to the convict's barrow, so that he may not flinch before the executioner, or redden at the sight of the hangman's rope.

"For he may not go as the knights of old to plant the cross of triumph in Jerusalem, nor as the soldiers of the newer world to till the field for freedom and water the earth with his life's blood.

"His challenger will be an unknown spy. A perjured Government will wage war with him.¹ A secret dungeon will be his battle-field, and a strong enemy will pronounce his doom.

"And, vanquished, his tombstone will be the scaffold's wood; his only glory the brief weeping of a woman, and the long night-talks of his compatriots."

¹ It will be remembered how the proceedings of the Russian Government in Poland have been throughout a flagrant violation of the Treaty articles to which it has bound itself. For this reason, the Poles frequently speak of the Rising of 1830, not as a Rising, but as a war. It was a war for their constitutional rights with a Government that had perjured itself.

The hint at Mickiewicz's own memories in this poem is interesting. The joy of his childhood had been to listen to the histories of his forefathers: that joy which, he says, must now be forbidden to the Polish child who may remember his nation's glory no more. He, himself, had known in the days of his imprisonment what it was to measure his strength in an unequal struggle with a "strong enemy."

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Such were the only auguries that Mickiewicz held out before his nation as she rose in that heroic and forlorn hope of 1830. Subsequent history has given them the bitterest of justifications.

From the outset, Mickiewicz watched the Rising with despair in his heart. The Poles by whom he was surrounded in Rome hailed the movement with transports of joy, as one bringing certain salvation to their country. Mickiewicz, who in later life hoped ever, each time to be more cruelly disillusioned, was on this occasion only too clear-sighted. Sadness overwhelmed him. With a curious want of sympathy Mendelssohn, who met him in Rome at the time and who went sightseeing with him, complained of his deep depression, and of the poor company he was in consequence. Then the spiritual struggle of his Konrad of *The Ancestors* swept down upon him, and waves of despair and darkness inundated his soul. But he rose above them, and, in his sorrow, fled to religion as to his only comfort.

The Polish Rising lasted from November, 1830, to September, 1831. Ill-prepared by a handful of youths, disorganised from the beginning, led by incapable chiefs, it is a matter for profound admiration that the Poles succeeded in holding their own so long. The story of the war is twofold. On the one hand, there is the mutual jealousy of its leaders ; want of harmony ; lack of discipline—those curses of the Polish nation that had already wrought her ruin. But this darker side of the picture must yield before a glorious chronicle of heroic valour against desperate odds ; of utter self-abnegation on the part of every class of

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Polish men and women ; of the most exalted and purest patriotism that, as has been observed, should rank in history by the side of Thermopylæ.¹ The Poles fell by thousands. “They were slain,” says an eye-witness who fought in the war, “like corn swept down by the sickle.”² Either in defeat or victory, the Polish soldier, were he inured to battle from his boyhood, or whether he were a peasant armed with an old hunting-gun, or a boy volunteer of some noble house who handled arms and saw war in its most cruel aspect for the first time ;—that Polish soldier fought with a devotion that must live honoured for all ages.

But the struggle of a nation without resources against the whole weight of the Russian empire was doomed. The victories of Stoczek, Nowa Wsia, Grochow, and others in which the Poles won the day over an enemy overwhelming in their numbers, only staved off the black hour of failure. The terrible battle of Ostrołenka, famous in the history of the Rising for Polish heroism, in which each Polish gunner died at his gun, and hundreds of Poles rushed to death singing the national hymn, was the beginning of the end. Disaster followed disaster, till all was lost at the storming of Warsaw.

No valour could avail to save Warsaw from her fate. Ordon blew up the rampart he was defending, and Pole and Russian perished alike. Another of the intrenchments was defended till not one Pole was left. From yet another, held by five hundred Poles against

¹ Paul Popiel, quoted by Count Stanislas Tarnowski, *Our History in the Nineteenth Century* (Polish). Cracow, 1901.

² *Ibid.*

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the Russian infantry and cavalry, the defenders were driven inch by inch from their posts, under the old wooden-legged general, Sowinski. Those who survived made their last stand in a cemetery, where they fought till they died. The handful remaining retreated on the cemetery chapel, and there laid down their lives. The Russians rushed over the dead bodies that strewed the ground to the spot where Sowinski sat, pale and resolute, before the altar. "Surrender, general," they shouted. For all answer, Sowinski killed the Russian nearest him, and then fell dead in his turn.¹

After the fall of Warsaw, the Rising, already hopeless and rendered doubly so by the incapacity of its leaders, practically came to an end.

Mickiewicz took no part in the Rising. Stefan Garczynski hurried off from Rome to join its ranks. Mickiewicz intended to follow him, and was so nearly doing so that a friend in Rome bade him godspeed as to one going to his death.² But he never fought after all. The empty state of his purse at first withheld

¹ Count Stanislas Tarnowski, *Our History in the Nineteenth Century*.

² This friend was a fervent young priest, named Choloniewski, who made a great friendship with Adam in Rome. His influence over Mickiewicz did much towards guiding the poet to spiritual peace. Mickiewicz said that he owed to him "much consolation, many happy moments, a new view of the world and of men" (J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*). In the December after the Rising had broken out, Choloniewski gave Mickiewicz a copy of à Kempis as a "viaticum" to accompany him through the perils of the war, with this inscription written on the first page: "Amicus fidelis medicamentum vitæ et immortalitatis; et qui metuunt Dominum invenient illum" (L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*).

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him, and perhaps his conviction of the hopelessness of the enterprise. When he left Rome, he stopped at Paris to see what could be done for the cause there, and then pushed on to Poland. But by the time that he reached Posen, the Rising was ending. Posen was filled with Poles from the front. Among them was Francis Mickiewicz, and the two fondly-attached brothers met each other once more. Adam then passed through a period of acute misery. His grief for his country, his poignant regret, as he listened to the narratives of those who had drawn the sword for Poland's sake, that he had not done likewise, filled him with such despair that he was tempted to commit suicide. So sad were the improvisations that he made at the houses of his friends that his hearers wept to hear them.

The agony of Poland now enters into the life of Adam Mickiewicz, and every contemporary Polish poet, to become part and parcel of their being. There are few darker records in the history of Europe than that of the fate that befell Poland at the hand of her Russian victor after the Rising of 1830. For the next seventeen years there is nothing to tell of her save one long heart-rending tale of merciless and barbarous oppression. Henceforth she is the nation given over to desolation and mourning.

It is beyond the limits of this book to enter into full details of the Russian persecutions in Poland. The main facts must suffice.

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Poland was destroyed as waste paper. The rights guaranteed to her by the Treaty of Vienna were swept away. Her

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ancient provinces were changed into Russian districts. Her army was annihilated. Russian coinage, the Russian calendar, were enforced. The administration of the departments of the treasury, justice and education, were transferred to Petersburg, with the result that we know. The national Universities of Warsaw and Wilna were done away with. Schools and establishments for public instruction were suppressed; the Russian language substituted for Polish in those that remained. The public and many of the private libraries and art treasures of Poland, including those that had been bequeathed under the express condition that they should never leave the country, were taken to Petersburg. The state funds were divided among the Russian generals. Russian officials were placed in most posts, and an odious system of espionage and delation reigned all over the land. Princely houses were reduced by confiscation to poverty. Those who had distinguished themselves most in the national government or army were singled out to lose their possessions by one stroke of the pen. Hundreds of innocent persons were condemned to death, and the numbers of those who languished in Russian dungeons or who dragged out a lingering martyrdom in the mines of Siberia till death delivered them, are beyond reckoning. Fathers and husbands were torn away from their homes and transported for life to the Caucasus. Sequestration and spoliation desolated the country. The national Church was subjected to an oppression that still obtains to this day. Then did the Polish mother become as another Rachel, bereft of her children. By a ukase of Nicholas I., several thousand male children,

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some orphans, but many with parents living, were seized by the Cossacks and carried off into Russia. Numbers fell out by the wayside. Left to perish there, with bread to last them for three days, the bodies of these hapless little victims were found lying dead by the food they had not had strength to touch. What exactly became of those who survived the journey to Russia has never been known, but the probability is that brought up by the Russian state they were, when old enough, drafted into the Russian army. One thing is certain, that not one of those Polish children ever returned to Poland or was ever seen again by those to whom he belonged.¹

"In one word," says Count Stanislas Tarnowski, "everywhere, in the greatest to the smallest things, all that was Polish was destroyed."² Poland was to be Polish no more, but Russian from end to end.

Out of these depths of anguish rose Mickiewicz's great lamentation, the Third Part of *The Ancestors*.

¹ Count Stanislas Tarnowski, *Our History in the Nineteenth Century*. W. K. Kelly, *History of Russia* (Bohn's Libraries). London, 1888.

² Count Stanislas Tarnowski, *op. cit.* It is an illustration of the terrible sufferings through which the Polish nation has passed that Count Tarnowski, after enumerating not only those details which I have given above and which I have taken mostly from his work, but several more, writes that, grievous as was the condition of Poland after the Rising of 1830, it had become still worse at the time that he wrote (in 1901).

CHAPTER IV

THE ANCESTORS (1832)

“Sorrow does not count her words, and through her tears cannot behold the paths of God.”—**LUCYAN SIEMIENSKI.**

MICKIEWICZ left Prussian Poland for Dresden in the spring months of 1832. It was in Dresden that he rose to the greatest height of his poetical inspiration. In the words of Konrad, he touched in one night the zenith of his power, his “Samson moment,” he himself marvelling at its strength.

Everything around him was of a nature to turn his passionately patriotic heart to his nation in her martyrdom. Tragic tales, which wrung from his lips the despairing cry of the *Improvisation*, were in his ears each hour. Dresden was crowded with Polish emigrants and with the soldiers of the Rising, and already Mickiewicz had taken to himself, with its unending griefs, the cause of the national emigration, “whose burden,” writes his son, “he was to carry until death.” His companions were Odyniec, Domeyko, his old friend and fellow-prisoner, whom he has affectionately immortalised in *The Ancestors* as “Żegota,” and Stefan Garczynski who, fresh from the seat of war and already stricken with his mortal disease, recounted to Adam the battle-scenes which he had witnessed.

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These four youths, who loved each other as brothers, spent every evening together either in Mickiewicz's room or in that of Odyniec, talking, disputing, but in perfect harmony, for hours into the night.¹ Then another poet, Wincenty Pol,² who had, like Garczynski, fought in the Polish army, would come to Mickiewicz and tell him of the stirring times through which he had passed. It is natural, therefore, to find Mickiewicz writing patriotic poems, by far the best of which is *The Redoubt of Ordon*. Mickiewicz had never seen fire, but this poem ranks high as a fine piece of war description. Garczynski had been present at this incident of the Rising. He repeated its details to Adam, who reproduced them in his own powerful word-painting. But with characteristic modesty, and with a literary generosity that was native to him, Mickiewicz always insisted that the poem was not entirely his, but also Garczynski's, who had described the scene to him. He therefore included it in the collection of his friend's poems that he was labouring to bring out while Garczynski was on his deathbed.

But all else that Mickiewicz wrote at this time fades before his great work, *The Ancestors*.

The poet's soul was now steeped in religion, and his moral influence and the fervour of his faith

¹ "Our dearest, our noblest, our most upright companion, Stephan Garczynski": in such terms is this youth, who seemed to throw a sort of spell of fascination upon all those who knew him, described by Odyniec, as he recorded those bygone days in Dresden (Letter of Edward Odyniec, given by L. Siemienki in his *Religion and Mysticism in the Life and Poetry of Adam Mickiewicz*).

² Pol's chief poem is *The Song of our Land*, a description in verse of the characteristics of each part of Poland.

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enkindled the hearts of those around him. Odyniec wrote to a friend that, thanks to Adam—

“Only now do I begin to see, and with my whole soul I have grasped, the true aim of life, no earthly aim, but one to which all those of earth are merely steps, for this aim is God, and the means of reaching Him is the ennobling of the soul.”¹

It was therefore a fitting moment for Mickiewicz's great mystic poem to arise.

During the first part of his stay in Dresden, Mickiewicz worked on a translation of Byron's *Giaour*. Then, as he knelt one day praying in a church, it seemed to him as though floods of poetry descending from the dome were inundating his being. He cast aside the translation. Poland alone held his heart. For weeks the pen scarcely left his hand. All thought and care for the morrow died : he lived in inspiration and creative ecstasy : he wrote *The Ancestors*.

“I live only for the hope that I will not cross my hands upon my bosom in my coffin without having done anything,” he wrote to Lelewel.² His conception of poetry is that of its great mission of teaching and raising man to a nobler life. He now considered his writings as a weapon for the national cause, taken up when the arms of war had been laid down defeated : the only means of defence left to him and his people. The time had come when the great moral leaders of the Polish nation were her poets.

Although Mickiewicz heads his drama by the

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz*. Letter to Joachim Lelewel, March 23rd, 1832.

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pathetic inscription to those three of his old comrades whom death had taken first in their exile :—

“To the memory of Jan Sobolewski, Cyprian Daszkiewicz, Felix Kółkowski, fellow-students, fellow-prisoners, fellow-exiles ; who, persecuted for love of their native land, died of yearning for their native land, in Archangel, in Moscow, in Petersburg,”

it is far from being merely the history of the catastrophe of his youth. The Third Part of *The Ancestors* is a many-sided work. Not only is it the noblest monument to suffering and persecuted Poland, but in its pages we have glimpses—rifts through the veils of dream and mystery—into the story of Adam’s inner life, such as he has given us nowhere else. And, further, as a picture of the soul driven to despair, not by its own misery, but by the sight of the sorrows of a nation, unrelieved, unavenged by Heaven, *The Ancestors* ranks as one of the great so-called sceptical dramas of the world ; by the moral standpoint of a Job or a Faust. We must remember, when considering the literary work and the mental attitude of the great romantic Polish poets in the thirties and onwards of the last century, that they and their nation were one, to modify slightly Mickiewicz’s expression. Their nation’s grief was their own personal grief. Those who despaired and doubted, despaired and doubted because they beheld their country given over to suffering and injustice. Hence, we realise how these several facets of *The Ancestors* in reality give out but one fiery light. All blend together and make one grand spiritual tragedy.

Throughout, there is something of mystery, of un-

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earthliness over the drama, strongly tinged by the mystic cast of Mickiewicz's mind.¹ The supernatural note is struck in the beginning by the strange dream-setting of the prologue. The prisoner, Konrad, who is of course more or less Mickiewicz himself, and a sort of reincarnation of the Gustavus of the earlier *Ancestors*, lies sleeping in his cell. His slumbers are a foreshadowing of the struggle for spiritual life or death that is awaiting him. Angels whisper warnings of the battle which his soul is soon to face. On the other side, evil spirits hiss temptations into his ears. He half wakes from time to time, uttering troubled words of perplexity at his dreams till, at the voice of the angel announcing that he will be free once more, he is aroused to the full misery of his lot. For the iron has eaten into his soul; the bitter corroding knowledge that for the Pole there is no freedom.

"'I know,'" (he says, and his words are a faithful echo of what must have been the cry out of the heart of every Polish poet of Mickiewicz's day), "'I know what it meaneth to be free by the mercy of the Muscovite. Miscreants will take the fetters off from my hands and feet alone, but they will

¹ Mickiewicz's preface to the Third Part illustrates in a marked degree that halo of mysticism in which he enveloped the persecution of the Lithuanian youth. "Every writer," he says, "who has mentioned that persecution of Lithuania, agrees that in the affair of the Wilna students there was something mystical and mysterious. The mystic character, gentle but unshakeable, of Thomas Zan, the leader of the youths; the religious resignation, the brotherly harmony and love of the young prisoners; the Divine punishment that visibly overtook the persecutors: left a deep impression upon the minds of those who were witnesses or partakers of these events. At their description, the reader seems transported into ancient times, times of faith and miracles."

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pierce into my soul : I shall be exiled ! Driven to wander among aliens, in a crowd of enemies, I, a singer. And none will understand aught of my song save its deformed and empty sounds. That only weapon they have not torn from my hand, but they have ruined it for me, they have shattered it in my hand. A living man, I shall become as one dead to my native land, and thought will die, buried in the darkness of my soul, like the diamond closed in the roughness of a stone.'"

Then he rises and writes on the wall of his prison :—

"D.O.M. Gustavus. Hic natus est Conradus."

Konrad, or rather Gustavus, dies to his youthful and earthly love, commemorated in the pages of the first *Ancestors*. Konrad is born to a nobler, higher passion, to which the Third Part of *The Ancestors* is consecrated, to that passion with which the name of the poet who penned this play is eternally linked—the devotion of the patriot.

"Satan and angels," breathes the spirit over Konrad's sleeping figure, "await, oh, man ! thy thought : whether thou fall to hell or shine in heaven."

The first scene opens at midnight in the corridor of the Basilian convent. The young prisoners, taking advantage of the guards being engaged in a drinking bout, and connived at by a corporal, himself a Pole and an old Napoleonic legionary, cautiously emerge into the passage with their lights. Subdued greetings, exclamations of surprise from friends at hearing the voices of other friends who have joined their ranks, pass rapidly between them till they agree to adjourn to Konrad's cell where, on account of its isolation,

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they can hold an assembly in less fear of discovery. There they prepare to spend the feast—it is Christmas Eve—in such pitiful cheer as the more light-hearted among them may be able to devise. As Mickiewicz wrote this scene, a faithful photograph, with the exception of the corporal who is said to be fictitious, of what really happened, how his heart must have travelled back through years of exile and of mental strife to that gathering on a past Christmas Eve in his prison cell, to his lost friends, three since dead far from their country, the others scattered to the poles. So vivid and so lifelike are these boys and youths, comrades united by warmest and brotherly affection, that the reader forgets that they are all long since in their graves, and, transported athwart three generations, he listens to their talk, to their fond chaff, as though he himself sat there in the prison with them.

But before the festivity, such as it is, can begin, all eyes are turned to the new arrival, Żegota (Ignacy Domeyko). Torn from his home that day, full of a young man's pride in his farm, breathing of the soil, he has little idea of what is in store for him. He tells how he heard the rumour of some trial or another in Wilna, which did not seem as if it could concern him in any way. Often his household saw *kibitkas*—the vehicles used in Russian Poland—galloping past, and each night they were startled by the ill-omened clatter of the post. Sometimes, when they were seated round the table and one of the company jingled his glass with his knife for a joke, the women turned pale with terror, thinking that

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they heard the bells at the heads of the Cossacks' horses. In answer to his words of cheerful anticipation of being soon restored to his beloved home, Zan gravely tells him the truth : how the infamous Novosiltzov is obliged, in order to regain his lost favour with the Tsar, to forge a conspiracy—with all the penalties that follow a conspiracy in the Russian empire—out of the students' societies.

“‘ We shall not escape the penalty,’” (goes on Zan). “‘ But one remedy remains. Let a few of us offer ourselves up as a sacrifice to our enemies, and take upon ourselves the guilt of all. I was at the head of your society, it is my duty to suffer for you. Give me a few more brothers, those who are orphans or older than the others, or unmarried, whose loss will not wring many hearts in Lithuania, and this will save the younger and those who are more necessary to their families.’”

At the moment that Mickiewicz wrote these lines, which were no fiction but a true record of Zan's own words, the latter was working out the price of his devotion in Siberia.

Melancholy overwhelms Żegota when he realises for the first time that he will probably behold his home no more. The conversation, in spite of Frejend's efforts to impart a playful note to it, turns to dreary themes. One prisoner tells how night and morning are all one to him, because no light can penetrate his cell. He does not even know how long he has been in prison.

“‘ Ask Thomas Zan,’” (says Frejend, still trying after a joke), “‘ he is the patriarch of woe. He is the biggest pike, he was the first to fall into the net. He welcomed us all here, and he will be the last to go out. He knows about everybody, who has arrived, where he came from, and when he came.’”

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“‘Is that Zan?’” (cries one of the prisoners who had not recognised him: and his words are worth recording to illustrate the passionate admiration that the Lithuanian youth felt for this man). “‘Give me your hand. You only knew me a little. You did not see me in the crowd; but I knew you. I know what you have done, what you have suffered, to shield us. Henceforth it will be my glory that I knew you, and in the day of my death I will remember that it was with Thomas that I wept.’”

But Frejend will not hear of anybody weeping; and in affectionate jest he declares that Zan is quite in his own element in prison, and that the fashionable hunger cure has been the very thing for him. Pressed by Żegota, Zan calmly gives the account of his imprisonment, before he was moved to better quarters, in some horrible subterranean den, where he was nearly poisoned by foul air and tainted food.

“‘For a week I ate nothing. Then I tried to eat. Then all my strength failed me. Then I felt pains as if I had been poisoned. Then for several weeks I lay unconscious. I do not know what sickness I passed through, because there was no doctor to give it a name.’”

Frejend declaring that the whole art consists in getting used to that sort of thing, one of the students says sadly that he has been in the prison for eight months, “and I yearn and pine as I did first, no less.”

“‘And no more?’” (from Frejend). “‘Thomas is so used to it that good air now oppresses his lungs and turns his head.’”

“‘I would rather be underground,’” (cries Zan, passionately, overcome by the sight of the young faces all around him, whose bright lives are ruined). “‘I would rather be there in starvation and sickness, to endure the knout and what is worse than the knout—going before the Commission, than to be here in a better prison, to find you as my companions.’”

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Frejend, however, scouts the idea of pity being wasted upon him. It does not matter about his life, he declares. What is his worth? But he would gladly be hung if only a man like Zan could live a little longer in the world for which he did so much. "Such as I," adds the gallant youth, "only serve our country by our deaths. I would die ten times to raise you, Zan, if only once from the dead—you, or the gloomy poet, Konrad."

He then implores the company to put aside lamentations; but all efforts at gaiety die, for Jan Sobolewski has news to tell that brings before his companions the vivid reality of the tragedy which has overtaken them. He was in the town that day, being led to his examination before the Commission: and a terrible silence falls upon the room while he describes the sad procession that he saw of boy after boy, friends and brothers of those now listening to his words, starting in chains to their eternal exile in Siberia.

"I saw them. I besought the corporal to halt. He allowed me a moment. I stood far off. I hid behind the pillars of the church. The people surrounded the prison like a motionless sea. Reaching from the gates of the square, like at great functions, stood troops in two lines, armed and with drums. In the middle were *kibitkas*. The head of the police who was on horseback had taken his place on the square. From his look, you would have thought that a great man was going to conduct a great triumph: the triumph of the Tsar of the north, the conqueror—of children! Soon the drum gave the signal, and the prison was opened. I saw them. Behind each one, a guard with a bayonet walked. Small boys, wasted and worn, all with their heads

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shaved, with chains on their legs. The youngest, a child ten years old, complained, poor child! that he could not lift his chain, and he showed his bare, bleeding leg. The head of the police came up, and looked at the chain: 'Ten pounds. It agrees with the prescribed weight.'¹

"They brought out Janczewski. He was disfigured, he had grown dark, he had grown thin, but somehow strangely ennobled. He who a year ago had been a playful, pretty little boy, to-day gazed out from the *kibitka*, as that emperor gazed from his desert rock—with dry, proud, calm eyes. Now he seemed to be comforting the companions of his bondage. Now he bade farewell to the people with a bitter but gentle smile, as though he would say to them: 'I do not mind much.' He saw that the people wept, as they looked at his chain. He shook the chain with his foot to prove that it was not too heavy for him, and then they lashed the horse, the *kibitka* started. He took his hat from his head, he stood up, and, straining his voice to its utmost, he shouted three times, '*Poland hath not perished yet!*'² The *kibitkas* disappeared in the crowd; but for long that hand raised to Heaven, that shaved head unashamed, proud, that proclaimed to all its innocence and its disgrace, that head and that hand have remained before my eyes and will remain in my mind, and on the road of my life they shall be my compass pointing and leading me to virtue. If I forget them," (breaks off the narrator in deep emotion,) "Oh, God in Heaven, forget Thou me."

To which "Amen" repeat all the other prisoners.

"In the meantime, the other *kibitkas* had driven up in one long row. They were drawn up one after the other. I cast a glance at the closely pressed throngs of the people, at the soldiers. Every face had grown pale as death. And

¹ It is said that after the Rising, children, sent to Siberia in chains intended for grown-up men, were seen along the route begging the passer-by for money to purchase lighter fetters.

² The first line of the famous song of the Polish legions.

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in that great crowd such was the heavy silence that I heard each movement of theirs, each sound of the chains. All felt that the punishment was inhuman. The people, the soldiers, felt it: but they were silent, so great is their fear of the Tsar. They brought out the last prisoner. It looked as if he were resisting, but it was because the poor boy could not walk. Each moment he tottered, he staggered slowly down the stairs, and hardly had he reached the second step when he fell his whole length. It was Wasilewski. He had been here in the prison near us. The day before yesterday, they flogged him so much that not one drop of blood remained in his face. A soldier came and lifted him from the ground. With one arm he carried him to the *kibitka*, but with his other hand he furtively wiped away tears. Even as Wasilewski had fallen on the ground, so he was carried on the soldier's arm, stiff, rigid as a pillar; and, as if he had been taken down from the cross, his hands were stretched on the soldier's shoulders, his eyes terrible, white, wide-opened. And the people opened their lips, and simultaneously one deep, hollow sigh torn from thousands of breasts groaned all around, as if all the graves groaned under the church. The soldiers drowned it with the drum and the word of command: 'To your arms! March!' They started, and the *kibitkas* flew down the street like a flash of lightning. One was empty, the prisoner was there, but could not be seen. Only a hand was stretched out to the people from the straw, a hand livid, wide-open—dead, that quivered as if in farewell.'

A long and painful silence follows Sobolewski's story. Those who have heard it know that on the morrow it will be their turn, and that they will be the actors, no longer the spectators, in the same scene.

At last they rouse themselves, and begin to talk and sing, and more or less to make merry. One of the prisoners, irritated at the sight of a priest, who is among them, praying, takes it into his head to sing

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a blasphemous song. At this Konrad, who has not uttered a word since he first greeted Żegota, angrily protests, to the great approval of the pious corporal, and declares that, although his old faith has disappeared he knows not where, he will not permit the name of Christ's Mother to be blasphemed. He then sinks into a gloomy brooding which attracts the raillery of his friends.

“‘Why is Konrad sitting silent and sad as if he were examining his conscience before going to Confession? Felix,¹ he has not heard your songs at all! Konrad! Look, he has turned pale. He has turned red. Is he going to faint?’

“‘Let him alone. Be quiet,’” (says Felix). “‘Oh, we know Konrad. We know what this means. Midnight is his hour. Now, Felix is dumb, and now we shall hear a better song. But we must have music. Frejend, you have got your flute. Play him his old tune.’²

“‘His spirit has fled and wanders far,’” (says another, looking curiously at Konrad). “‘How strange his eyes are! Fire flashes beneath their lids. The soul has left them. They sparkle like camp-fires abandoned by the army.’³

Frejend plays. Then Konrad bursts out with a horrible song of diabolical vengeance against his country's enemy. Heedless of the priest's stern rebuke, he sings on in a state of wild exaltation that soon degenerates into poetic delirium. This song of

¹ Felix Kółkowski, to whom the play is dedicated.

² It will be remembered that Mickiewicz improvised in prison, and that his improvisations were always made to music, and, as long as they were together, to Frejend's flute.

³ It is affirmed by those who saw him while he improvised that Mickiewicz's physiognomy underwent an extraordinary change in those moments.

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his is the lesser improvisation that heralds in the great and famous *Improvisation*.

“‘I soar, I fly, thither to the summit. I am above the race of man, among the prophets! Whence my eye cleaves as with a sword the dark clouds of the future. With my hands I tear, as though with blasts of storm, her mists asunder. All is bright, clear. From the heights I gaze upon mankind. Here is the Sybil’s book of the world’s future fate. Below—see, see—the coming events and following years. They are like little birds when they see the eagle, me, the eagle in the heavens! At them, oh, at them, oh, my falcon eyes! My lightning eyes! At them, my talons! I see them, I will seize them. What bird hath risen and spreads its wings, darkening all, challenging me with its eye? Its wings are black as the clouds of storm, and wide and long as a rainbow’s arch, and it hideth the whole sky.’¹

“‘It is a mighty raven. Who art thou, who art thou, raven? Who art thou? I am the eagle! The raven looks . . . he entangles my thought. He has looked upon me; he hath smitten mine eyes as with smoke, he confuses my thought, he entangles . . .’

“‘What is he talking about?’” (cry some of the other youths, alarmed). “‘Look how white he is!’ They seize hold of Konrad. ‘Keep quiet.’

“‘Stop! Stop!’” (says Konrad, struggling). “‘I have entered the lists with the raven. . . . Stop! I will disentangle my thought . . . I will finish my song . . . I . . . will . . . finish . . .’ He staggers.

“‘We have had enough of these songs,’” (exclaim the audience).

¹ This raven was Satan, darkening the future. The point of this will be understood when we realize that hope and a clear vision of a happier future for the nation was the fundamental doctrine upon which the great Polish mystic-patriotic poetry was built.

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““Enough !”” (repeats the Corporal). ““May the Lord God be with us ! There is the bell ! Do you hear the bell ? The patrol, the patrol is at the gates ! Put out the fire. Off to your cells !””

They all escape, leaving Konrad lying in a dead faint on the floor.

Then follows the greatest poem that Mickiewicz ever wrote, the magnificent *Improvisation*. So mighty is its power that, says Dr. Kallenbach, it conveys an idea of something aloof and entirely isolated from the rest of Mickiewicz’s work.¹ It stands alone, like some giant lonely boulder in mid-ocean. The agony of the poet’s soul is laid bare for once : his long and weary spiritual strife, the inconsolable anguish of a heart wrung, not for its own loss, for Gustavus was dead within Mickiewicz and Konrad was born in his stead, but for his nation’s sorrows, whose load was his cross of suffering all his life. We have seen how the history of Poland and her literature are inseparably entwined. Her sufferings gave birth to her great romantic poetry. Her poets were her bards, her prophets, her leaders. The *Improvisation* opens, therefore, with a description of the poet’s inspiration. So lofty was Mickiewicz’s conception of the poet’s calling that to his thought the poet was as one set apart, the worker of miracles, the inspired from on high whose lips had been touched with the living coal. How a time came when he deemed his own self unable and unworthy to realise this ideal and so he wrote no more, is one of the tragedies of his life and of Polish letters. It has been said that as the expression of a poet’s mind at the

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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very moment of its inspiration, the *Improvisation* stands unrivalled in literature.

Konrad is alone in the unbroken silence of his prison. The dungeon holds his body ; but what is man or man's bonds to him ? He, genius, is above man. It is to God and Nature that he cries to hearken to his song :—

“‘ My song, thou art a star beyond the boundaries of the world ! And earthly vision pursuing thee, albeit it shall take wings of crystal, shall not reach thee, and shall but strike against thy Milky Way. My songs, ye do not need men’s eyes, men’s ears ! Flow in the deep places of my soul, shine on her heights, even as subterranean streams, as stars beyond the skies !

“‘ Oh, God, oh, Nature, hearken unto me ! My music and my song are worthy of you : I am the master ! I, the master, stretch forth my hands, I stretch them even to the skies, and I lay my hands upon the stars, as on the crystal wheels of an harmonica. Now fast, now slow, as my soul wills, I turn the stars. Millions of sounds flow forth. ’Twixt millions of sounds each sound I caught, each sound I know. I mingle them, I part them, I unite them ; I weave them into rainbows, harmonies, and verse. I pour them forth in sounds, in lightning streamers.

“‘ I have taken away my hands, I have raised them above the borders of the world, and the wheels of the harmonica are held in their flight. Alone I sing. I hear my songs ; long, wailing, as the breathing of the tempest’s blast, they moan with grief, they roar with storm, and the ages answer them with deep echoings. And each sound together plays and flames. I see each one, I hear each one, as I hear the flight of the wind when, whistling, it rocks the waves, as I see it in its robe of cloud.

“‘ Worthy of God and Nature are such songs ! That song is great, that song is creation, that song is strength, is power, that song is immortality ! I feel immortality, I create

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immortality ! What greater couldst Thou do, oh, God ? See how I draw these thoughts from mine own self, in words I clothe them. They fly, they are scattered through the skies, they wheel, they play, they shine. Already far away, I feel them still. I love their charms, I guess their movements with my thought. I love ye, my poetic children ! my thoughts ! my stars ! my feelings ! my storms ! I stand amidst you like a father 'midst his children ! Ye are all mine !

“Oh, all ye poets, ye wise men and prophets whom the wide world hath honoured, I spurn you ! Even if you have walked among the children of your souls, even if you have heard all praise and all applause that there might be, and knew they were deserved ; and even if all the splendour of your fame flamed as rays of light in your wreaths of glory, you would not feel my joy, my power, as I feel to-night, in this lonely night, when alone I sing within myself, alone I sing unto myself. Yea, I feel,¹ and I am powerful, and I have understanding ! Never have I felt as in this moment. To-night is my zenith, to-night is the crisis of my power. To-night I shall know whether I am the greatest of all mankind or but the proudest. To-night is the predestined moment, to-night I stretch forth the wings of my soul most powerfully. This is the moment of Samson, when the blind captive dreamed beneath the column. I will cast off my body, and as a spirit I will take pinions only. I must soar ! I will fly from the turning-wheel of planets and of stars, and I will reach to the boundaries of the Creator and of Nature.

“And I have them, I have them, I have these two wings. They will suffice. I will spread them wide from the west to the east, I will strike the past with the left, the future with the right, and on the flames of love I will come—to Thee ! And I will gaze into Thy love, oh, Thou ! of whom they say that Thou lovest in the Heavens. I am here, I have come, Thou seest what my power is ; my wings reach even here !

¹ All through the *Improvisation* Mickiewicz's admiration of feeling, his conviction of its superiority over the intellect, plays a very large part.

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But I am man, and my body is there on earth. There did I love, and in my country hath remained my heart.

“ But that love of mine in the world, that love hath not rested on one man as the winged insect on the flowering rose ; not on one family, not on one century. I love the whole nation ! I have gathered in my arms all her past and future generations. I have pressed them to my bosom, as a friend, a lover, a husband, as a father. I would fain raise her, give her joy, I would fain make the whole world marvel at her. I have no power to do this—and I have come here to find it. I have come armed with the whole strength of thought, that thought which tore Thy thunderbolts from Heaven, that tracked Thy planets' march, and flung wide open the deep bottom of the sea. I have more—a power men do not give, for I have that feeling which like the volcano smoulders in itself and now and then smokes forth in speech.

“ I was born a creator ! My powers came from whence came Thine to Thee. Thou didst not seek them. Thou hast them, Thou dost not fear to lose them—and I fear not. In the moments of my power, when I gaze on high at the trails of clouds and hear the wandering birds sailing on wings scarce seen, I will : and with my eye I hold them in the snare. The flock tolls out a song of pain, but, till I let them go, Thy wind will not disperse them. When, with my soul's whole strength I gaze upon a comet, as long as I look on it it will not move.¹ Only corrupted man, weak but immortal, does not serve me, does not know me—does not know us both, Thee and me. Here, in Heaven, I seek the means of ruling them. I would fain wield that power I have on Nature over human souls. As with one sign I rule the birds and stars, thus must I rule my fellow-men. Not with weapons, weapons give back weapons. Not with song, song

¹ The mystic, Towianski, of whom in later years Mickiewicz became the chief disciple, taught that by his will he could restrain a steam vessel as she ploughed the sea. Both he and Mickiewicz believed that from a distance their wills could control events in their country.

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grows too slowly. Not with learning, it swiftly moulders. Not with miracles, they are too loud. I would fain rule with the feeling that is in me, rule even as Thou rulest over all. Let them at once divine my will and work it, and then they will be happy. And if they disobey, let them suffer and be lost. Let men be for me as thoughts and words from which a house of song is woven at my will. They say that even thus Thou rulest. Thou knowest that I have not corrupted thought, that I have not squandered speech. If Thou wilt grant me a like power over souls, I will create my nation as a living song, and greater marvels will I work than Thou ; I will intone a song of joy ! Give me the rule of souls ! So much do I despise that dead building which the common herd, praising it, call the world, that I have not tried yet if my word could not at once destroy it. But I feel within myself that if I concentrated, strained, and with one flash flashed forth my will, I could extinguish a hundred stars, and light another hundred. For I am immortal. In the sphere of created things there are other immortals, but I have met none greater than I am. Thou are greatest in Heaven, and I have sought Thee here, I greatest of those who feel in the valley of earth. I have not met Thee yet, but I conjecture that Thou art. Let me meet Thee and let me feel Thy greatness. I would have power. Grant it to me or show me the way to reach it. I have heard that there have been prophets, rulers of souls, and I believe it : but what they could, I can. I would fain have power like Thou possessest. I would fain rule souls even as Thou dost rule them.”

Here he pauses, with his first blasphemies trembling on his lips. He awaits Heaven’s answer. There is a long silence. Baffled, enraged, Konrad cries :—

“ ‘Thou art silent ! Now I know, I have found Thee out, I understand what Thou art, and how Thou rulest. He hath lied who called Thee love. Thou art only—wisdom. With the mind, not with the heart, men shall find Thy ways; with the mind, and not the heart, shall discover the fashioning of

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Thy arms. Only he who has dug deep into books, into metal, into calculation, into dead corpses, only he has succeeded in usurping a portion of Thy power. He will find poison, dust, steam, he will find glare, smoke, din, he will find law and evil faith used against wise and ignorant men. Thou hast given the world to thought, and Thou leavest the heart in eternal penance.'"

The significance of this outrage against God lies in Mickiewicz's own mental outlook. The powers of his mind were as the plumes of eagles cleaving the skies. Yet he disdained mere wisdom. Placing the heart in counterpoise against the brain, he regarded the latter with a species of horror. In the spiritual crisis of his life, when he was carried away by the delusions of false mysticism, those friends of his who argued and pleaded with him were brought up against this wall : that Mickiewicz would not listen to the dictates of reason but to the leading of his heart. In his political system, nations and governments were to be ruled by love, by feeling.

Then, as blasphemous ravings rend Konrad's soul, there begins the struggle of angels and demons for its mastery. On one side, exulting cries rise from the spirits of darkness, goading the sinner to his doom ; on the other the voices of the angels, seeking to defend him with their wings, mourn for the falling star.

For now opens the tragic, the overwhelming, moment of the *Improvisation*. So far we have seen the creature measuring his forces against those of the Creator, the proud intellect seeking to dash down the barriers of its limitations, hurling itself in vain against the immovable rock of Eternal Wisdom. But this is

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only a prelude to the real point of Konrad's wrath with Heaven. The *Improvisation* is not the mere poem of intellectual revolt. The Pole's prayer, his agonised entreaty, is that it may be accorded to him, in a world mastered by brute force, to rule souls by love, in a commonwealth ground down by cruelty to intone the hymn of joy. For, though he is a poet and therefore a creator, he is something more, and that which outweighs all else in his heart—he is a Pole, and he is a patriot. All his days, the Pole had seen injustice and oppression before his eyes ; he had been surrounded not by the sweetness, but by the bitter things of life. Konrad's temptation, says Mr. Ladislas Mickiewicz, is that of the whole Polish race.¹ Maddened by the sight of a people's tears calling to Heaven in vain, he sinks beneath the load of his country's misery. It is this note of human anguish that gives the *Improvisation* its peculiar and, we might say, its terrible power. We can listen coldly, critically, to the raving of the overstrung mind, the delirious genius that, carried away by its own creative exaltation, stretches forth to what no man can ever reach. But who can gaze unmoved at the spectacle of the tortured soul, striving to comprehend the problem of suffering and evil that each day meets her gaze, and that finally drags her down into a bottomless abyss ? Who can listen without emotion to the abandonment of agony that sweeps Konrad, the type, the scapegoat of the victims of a hideous wrong, into a rage of impiety and blasphemy ? He stands forth in the name of the whole human race and challenges the Heaven that

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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seems silent before the cry for succour of millions of mankind. It is for his nation's sake, not for his own, that he declares war against God. Her sufferings, not his, drive him to madness and despair. The *Improvisation* is not an exercise of rhetoric, a brilliant feat of a poet's sympathetic imagination. Mickiewicz, he who was one with his nation, wrote it, overwhelmed with grief when the vengeance of Nicholas I. was spreading unutterable desolation throughout all Poland. It was the cry of his breaking heart, the great tidal wave of a sea of sorrow. It nearly cost him his life. After he had written it, he fell, like his own Konrad, unconscious to the ground.

With the pleading strains of the angels, the fierce cries of the devils, resounding about him, Konrad, still wildly clinging to his moment of inspiration, in its strength defies God :—

““ Once more I challenge Thee. Still as a friend I unbare my soul to Thee. Art Thou silent ? Yet surely against Satan Thou didst war in person ? I challenge Thee. Despise me not ; I am not alone, although I am raised to these heights alone. On earth my heart is brothered with a great nation. I will wage with Thee a bloodier war than Satan. He fought for the intellect, I challenge for the heart. I have suffered, I have loved, I have grown in torments and in love. When Thou didst tear from me my personal joy, I did not raise my hand against Heaven.

““ Now is my soul incarnate with my country,””

he continues in those oft-quoted lines, perhaps the most famous in all Polish literature : words that have rung wherever in the wide world the Polish tongue has been carried by her exiled sons, and that have been

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among the many reasons that have caused Mickiewicz to be so passionately beloved by his people :—

“‘I and my country are one. My name is Million, because I love millions and for millions suffer torment. I look on my unhappy land as the son upon his father broken on the wheel. I feel the sufferings of the whole nation as the mother feels within her bosom the sufferings of her child.

“‘I suffer, I madden,’” (he goes on,) “‘and Thou, wise and happy, ever rulest, ever judgest, and they say Thou dost not err.

“‘Hearken ! If that be true which I heard with a son’s faith when I came into this world, that Thou lovest : if Thou, creating it, didst love the world : if Thou hast a father’s love for what Thou didst create : if the loving heart was in the group of creatures that Thou didst shut inside the ark and deliver from the deluge : if beneath Thy rule love is not a mere anomaly : if love is necessary for aught in Thy world, and is not only Thy mistaken figure . . . ’”

He breaks off, and there is no sound save that of the powers of light and darkness battling for his soul.

He resumes :—

“‘Thou art silent ! I have opened the depths of my heart to Thee. I implore Thee, give me power, one small part of power, a part of that which on the earth pride has won. With that small part, what joy I would create ! Thou art silent ! Thou wilt not give it to the heart, oh, give it to the brain ! Thou seest that I am the first of men and of the crowd of angels, that I know Thee better than Thy archangels. I am worthy that Thou shouldst share half of Thy power with me. If I have not divined Thee right, reply. Thou art silent, and Thou trustest that Thou hast a mighty hand. Know that feeling will burn what the mind will not break. Thou seest that my burning-glass is love.

“‘Answer me, for I will shoot against Thy nature ! If I do not overthrow it into ruins, then I will shake the whole

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space of Thy dominions. For I will send my voice forth through all the boundaries of creation, that voice which shall descend from generation to generations. I will cry that Thou art not the father of the world but . . .'

"*The voice of the demon.—‘The Tsar! ’*"

At this culmination to his blasphemy—the full point of which will be appreciated when we remember that to the Pole under Nicholas I. the word Tsar was the synonym of the most cruel and relentless of persecutors, of the master of the knout and of inhuman penalties, of, in short, a ruler whose personal and vindictive hatred of his Polish subjects knew no mercy—at the realisation, then, of whither his passion has led him, Konrad halts, staggers, and falls senseless to the ground. Then follows the wild rush of the demons into the cell as, with savage cries, they leap upon his body, clamouring for their prey.

The circumstances under which Mickiewicz wrote the *Improvisation* are too significant to pass over in silence. He wrote it in one night. So terrible was the tension of his soul as the words, torn out of his pain, poured from his lips that he thought he would have died while he wrote. All night his friends heard the murmuring of his voice, followed by the sound of some sort of blow or fall. In the morning he was found lying insensible on the floor of his room.

What passed in the poet's soul in that night—the supreme hour of his poetic inspiration—he never told; but if, which seems probable, the waves of despair broke over his head and he went down to hell, it was for the last time in his life. The "dolce color d'oriental zaffiro" breaks through the storm in the

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remaining pages of *The Ancestors*, and, rising as a great spiritual teacher, Mickiewicz henceforth dwells, his heart wrung with sorrow but undaunted thereby, in the empyrean of heavenly love.

For *The Ancestors*, far from being a dreary sceptical drama, becomes a great Christian hymn of Divine mercy.

The demons, raging over Konrad's prostrate form, flee at the sound of prayers that are being said for his soul;¹ and, with the words, "Peace to this dwelling, peace to the sinner," a Capuchin friar enters the cell.² He is brought in by the worthy corporal, who has had misgivings ever since he heard Konrad's song, and whose uneasiness has been increased by the strange sounds that he has heard proceeding from the cell, and by something that he saw there as he looked through the keyhole.

There lies Konrad stricken to the earth, unconscious, moaning of a fathomless abyss, haunted through the heavy coils of his stupor by the vision of his friend, Rollison, the only son of a blind and widowed mother, and who, under torture in the prison, is beset with temptations to suicide.

"'The pit'" . . . (falters Konrad between his sobs). "'A thousand years . . . it is empty. . . . that is well . . . still more! . . . I shall last out ten thousands of thousand years. . . . Pray. . . . Here prayer availeth nought. . . . And was

¹ An allusion to the prayers of Henryka Ankwickz and Marcellina Łempicka (*see Chapter III.*).

² The mystic Oleszkiewicz is said to be the prototype of the friar. These touches of autobiography in *The Ancestors* are very striking.

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there such a bottomless and boundless pit? I knew it not.
. . . And yet there was.'

"Thou hearest how he sobs," (from the corporal).

"Son," (says the monk in whose arms he lies,) "thou art resting on a heart that loves thee."

Then, seeing that something inexplicable has occurred, he bids the corporal retire and look to it that no one enters.

The priest and Konrad are alone in the demon-haunted cell. Then from Konrad's unconscious lips fall broken words of agony; words breathing out a measureless and inconsolable despair, and perhaps the saddest lines that Mickiewicz, the son of a persecuted race, ever wrote:—

"I see hence, yea, even hence, though it is dark . . . deep. I see thee, Rollison! Brother! Thou too art in the prison, scourged, all streaming with blood. And God hath not listened to thee, and thou art in despair. Thou seekest a knife, thou dost try to dash thy head against the walls: 'Help!' God doth not give it, I cannot give it thee. But I will show thee the way to death. Thou hast a window. Dash it open, leap, leap down, and break thy neck. And fly with me to the deep, to darkness. . . . Let us fly to the pit . . . the abyss. . . . That abyss is better than the vale of earth. There, there are no brothers, mothers, nations, tyrants. . . ."

As he listens, the priest recognises that an evil spirit has taken possession of the prisoner and is speaking with his voice. The struggle for Konrad's soul begins between the minister of Christ and the demon. The friar arms himself with prayer and the formula of exorcism used by the Catholic Church.

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The unhappy Konrad answers with a stupid polyglot of gibberish and falsehood. At length, the priest on fire to save Konrad's companions in misery no less than him, drags out from the unwilling demon, always speaking through Konrad's lips, the true condition of the forlorn prisoner who would fain take his life ; how he may still be saved by comfort, and that it is Christ's Body and Blood that will withhold that tempted soul from perishing. Even as he gives this witness against himself, the evil spirit is put to flight, and Konrad wakes. What are the first words of him whom love has lifted from his fall?

“*Konrad*.—‘Dost thou raise me? Who art thou? Beware lest thou thyself shalt fall into these depths. He gives me his hand. . . . Let us fly! Like a bird I fly to the heights. I breathe sweet scents, I shine with light. Who gave me his hand? Good men and angels! . . . Whence your pity that descended to this pit? . . . Men? I despised men, I have not known the angels.’

“‘Pray,’” (says the priest,) “‘for the hand of the Lord hath terribly touched thee. The lips with which thou hast outraged the Eternal Majesty, those lips the evil spirit hath polluted with hideous words, with words of folly, heaviest punishment for the learned lips. God grant that they may be counted as thy penance, God grant that thou shalt forget them. . . .’

“‘They are there,’” (sighs out Konrad,) “‘hammered in.’

“*The priest*.—‘God grant, oh, sinner, that thou thyself shalt never more decipher them, that God shall never ask thee an account of them. Pray. Thy thought, clothed in foul words, has been cast down like a sinning queen from her throne. When in a suppliant's garb, with ashes on her head, she hath fulfilled the time of penance, she will return again to her throne, put on her royal robes, and shine with a greater splendour than before. He hath fallen asleep. . . .’”

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Kneeling, the friar cries :—

“‘Oh, Lord, Thy mercy is beyond all bounds !’”

Prostrating himself in the form of a cross, he pours forth a fervent prayer for Konrad’s pardon :—

“‘Oh, Lord, behold I am Thy servant of old, a hoary sinner, a worn-out servant, useless to Thee. But he is a youth. Make him, instead of me, the servant of Thy faith, and I will take all the punishment for his sin. He will amend himself, he will glorify Thy name. Let us pray. Our Lord is kind. The Lord will accept the sacrifice.’”

He prays in silence. Suddenly there rings through the gloomy dungeon the sound of the Christmas hymns from the church hard by and, above the prostrate figures of the priest and the sinner whom he has saved, sweet high voices of child-angels begin to sing to the air of one of the Polish Christmas carols :—

“‘Peace to this dwelling. Rest to the sinner. Oh, servant of God, humble, tranquil servant, thou hast brought peace to the house of pride ! Peace to this dwelling !’”

Above their pure accents rise the grander harmonies of the archangels, pleading for justice and for mercy in alternate strains that rise and fall, answering one another, like the great choirs of some noble oratorio :—

“*The first archangel.*—‘Oh, Lord, he hath sinned, he hath grievously sinned against Thee.’

“*The second archangel.*—‘But Thy angels are weeping for him, Thy angels are praying for him.’¹

“*The first archangel.*—‘Tread down, oh, Lord, break to fragments, oh, Lord, those who despise Thy holy decrees.’

¹ Another tribute to the prayers of Eva and Marcellina.

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"The second archangel."—"But forgive those who have not understood Thy holy decrees."

"An angel."—"When, flying with the star of hope, I shone upon Judea, the angels sang the hymn of birth. The wise men saw us not. Kings hearkened not to us. But shepherds saw, and ran to Bethlehem. Poor, simple, lowly men first welcomed the Eternal Wisdom and owned the Eternal rule."

"The first archangel."—"When the Lord saw pride and craft in the hearts of his servant archangels, the Lord did not forgive the eternal spirits, the pure angels. Bands of angels fell like a rain of stars from the heavens, and the rain of the minds of learned men fall with them every day."

"The child-angels."—"The Lord shows to the lowly what He refuses to the great. Have pity, pity, on the son of earth! He was among the great. Have pity on the son of earth!"

"The second archangel."—"He did not search into Thy decrees as one curious to know. Nor was it for human wisdom that he sought, nor yet for fame."

"The first archangel."—"He knew Thee not, he did not revere Thee, oh, our great Lord! He loved Thee not, he called not upon Thy name, oh, our Redeemer!"

"The second archangel."—"But he honoured the name of Thy most holy Mother. He loved a nation, he loved much, he loved many."

"Choir of angels."—"We love mankind so much, we would fain dwell with them. Driven forth by sage and king, the simple give us shelter. O'er him we sing, by night and day."

"Both choirs of archangels."—"Lift Thou his head. He shall arise from the dust, he will reach to the skies, and of his own will he will fall and honour the cross. May the whole world with him prostrate itself at the foot of the cross, and let it praise Thee for Thy justice and mercy, our Lord and our God."

Then all the angelic voices in unison, the choirs of
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the child-angels and the archangels, ring out in a closing chorus :—

““ Peace, peace to simple souls, to lowly tranquil virtue ! Oh, humble, tranquil servant ! Thou hast brought peace into the home of pride, peace to the sinning orphaned soul !””

The testimonies of the angels that heavenly gifts are bestowed only on the lowly and humble of heart are in strict accordance with Mickiewicz’s character. Bohdan Zaleski said of him that “he wedded the simplicity of his soul to the grandeur of his thought. He believed that the prayer of a shepherd could save the world.”¹ *The Ancestors* is the poet’s great protest against the lust of intellectual pride.

It will be noticed that at first sight Heaven seems dumb to Konrad’s cry of anguish. Yet, as we look closer, we find that it is neither silent nor unmoved. It answers, but in no way that appeals to the reason. For it is charity that, swift-winged, hastens to heal the broken heart. Love, fearless and strong to save, enters the prison-house of pain, and raises the lost and fallen soul. Through human means, he who had wandered finds his way back to God. Even passing over every other spiritual aspect of this great mystical drama, by this one episode alone Mickiewicz shines forth pre-eminently in the character that his countrymen justly honour in him, as the apostle of love.

We will not linger on what remains of the unfinished drama. The scenes become unconnected with, it is

¹ These words occur in Zaleski’s funeral oration at Mickiewicz’s grave. (L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*).

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true, one thread that loosely binds the whole together, the influence of the supernatural presences that hover about us unseen. Eva, praying for the prisoner, is wafted into a vision by choirs of angels, whose cadences of unearthly music, flower-strewn, light-laden, are among Mickiewicz's most harmonious songs. Her appearance in the play is as evanescent as that of an angelic visitant; her scene fades into that of Konrad's Capuchin in his cell. The spectacle of the flower of Poland's youth, in whom lie the nation's dearest hopes, being swept through desert snows to Siberia, unrolls itself before his gaze. Then arises the restorer of his country, whose "name shall be forty-four."¹ "Oh, Lord, hasten the hour of his coming when my people will be consoled." But before this may befall, the priest looks with horror-stricken eyes upon his country's agony. Poland must endure untold sufferings before at length she is exalted and reaches that pinnacle of glory, won by her pain, that spiritual empire over Slavonia and over all Christendom, that was the great goal of Mesyanistic dream and striving. This vision of the friar, granted to his humility, withheld from Konrad on account of his pride, is one of the earliest Mesyanistic poems in Polish literature. In his ecstasy the priest again beholds the chosen man, the "vicegerent of freedom on the earth," the blind man, led by an angelic page,

¹ Mickiewicz's belief in the mystic significance of numbers was greatly influenced by his studies of Jacob Boehme. To all this extraordinary passage, the foretelling, if such it was, of the arrival of the prophet, Towianski, whom Mickiewicz looked upon as the chosen man, we shall return when we reach the advent of Towianski into the poet's life.

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the man with three faces, at whose feet shall be kings and peoples.¹

The action next passes to the diabolic apparitions that blacken the sleep of Novosiltzov. The scenes that follow of the talk about the Lithuanian persecutions in Warsaw society, for the description of whose salons Mickiewicz drew on his recollections of the great houses he had frequented in Odessa, need not detain us, with the exception of one episode. A guest tells the history of his friend, Cichowski, "and," says Dr. Kallenbach, significantly, "in Poland there are many Cichowskis."²

"I knew him when I was a child. He was young then, lively, witty, gay, famous for his good looks. He was the life of the company. Wherever he appeared, he amused everybody with his stories and jokes. He loved children, and often took me on his knee. Children used to call him the merry man. Then he married. I remember that he brought the children presents from his betrothed, and invited us to his wedding. Then for a long time he never came, and it was said in my home that no one knew where he had vanished; he had secretly disappeared. Officials hunted for him, but they found no traces of him. At last it was said that he had killed himself, that he was drowned. The police confirmed these conjectures by a proof. They found his cloak on the banks of the Vistula. They brought the cloak to his wife. She recognised it. He was dead. The body was not found—and so a year passed away. Why did he kill himself? This was asked, this was gone into, he was mourned, he was wept and at last forgotten. And two years went by.

¹ The three faces signify the threefold message to the world that Mickiewicz considered Towianski to hold: to Slavonia, to France, and to Israel.

² J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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“One evening they were taking prisoners to the Belvedere from another prison. The evening was dark and rainy. Somebody—I do not know whether it was by accident or on purpose—was a witness of this procession. Perhaps it was one of the brave youths of Warsaw, who keep watch on the whereabouts and names of the prisoners. Patrols were in the streets, dead silence in the town. Then someone cried out from behind a wall : ‘Prisoners, who are you ?’ A hundred names answered. Among them his name was heard, and the next day his wife was told. She wrote and she ran, she begged, she implored, but she heard nothing save that one name. And again three years passed on without a trace or news of him ; but some one, it was not known who, spread the report through Warsaw that he was alive, that he was being tortured, that he refused to disclose anything, and that so far he had told nothing. For many nights they would not let him sleep. They fed him with herrings, and would give him nothing to drink. They drugged him with opium, and sent horrible apparitions to him. They tickled him on the soles of his feet, and under his armpits. But soon others were taken prisoners, others began to be talked about. His wife still wept, but every one else forgot him.

“Not long ago, someone rang at his wife’s house in the night. The door was opened. There stood an officer and a policeman, both armed, and a prisoner. It was he ! They ordered pen and paper to be given him, to sign that he had returned alive from the Belvedere. They took the note, and threatened him with their fingers, ‘If you let out . . .’ They did not finish the sentence. They went as they had come.

“It was he. I rushed to see him. A friend warned me : ‘Do not go to-day, because you will find a spy near the gates.’ I went the next day. There were police at the door. I went in a week’s time. This time it was he himself who would not see me ; he was ill. Then not long ago I met him driving outside the town. I was told it was he, for I did not recognise him. He had grown fat, but it was

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a horrible fatness. He was swollen by foul food and poisoned air. His cheeks were puffed out, they had grown yellow and pale. His forehead was wrinkled as if he were half a century old, all his hair had fallen off. I bade him welcome. He did not know me, he would not speak to me. I told him who I was. He looked at me and did not see me. When I told him the details of our old acquaintance, then he fixed his eyes inquiringly upon me. Ah ! all that he had suffered in his daily tortures, and all that he had thought in his sleepless nights, I knew it all in that one moment from his eyes. . . . From them I saw that he had languished in damp, in solitude, underground, in darkness.

“In a month I went again. I thought that by then he would have had time to look about him, and that his memory would have come back. But for so many thousand days he had been under the ordeal of the inquest, so many thousand nights he had communed alone with himself, for so many years tyrants had carried on the inquiry by torture, for so many years he had been surrounded by walls that had ears, when his only defence was silence and his only companion darkness, that a gay city could not blot out in one month the lesson of so many years. The sun is to him as a spy, the day his traducer, his servants his jailers, each guest an enemy. If any one comes to his house to visit him, at the sound of the bolt being shot, he thinks at once : ‘They are coming for the inquiry.’ He turns his back, he leans his head upon his hand. Apparently he is gathering together his presence of mind, all the powers of his brain. He compresses his lips so that no words shall escape them. He casts down his eyes so that the spies shall guess nothing from his eyes. If the visitors ask him a question, he, still thinking that he is in prison, runs to the other end of the room and is hidden there in the shadows, always crying out two sentences : ‘I know nothing. I shall say nothing.’ These two sentences have become his watchword. And his wife and child weep long on their knees before him, till he can overcome his fear and his horror.”

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Through these scenes in the Warsaw and Wilna salons, in the latter of which the poet depicts in lurid colours the cruelty of Novosiltzov and his satellites repulsing, in the midst of their dancing and feasting, the agonised entreaty of the blind mother for her imprisoned son, we are asking ourselves what has become of Konrad. He reappears, but only as a swift passing figure. The Capuchin, having boldly warned the persecutors of the Divine vengeance that will fall upon them,¹ leaves Novosiltzov's presence, and meets Konrad, who is being led by two soldiers to his trial. At the sight of the friar, Konrad halts and gazes at him, bewildered, astounded. Where has he seen that face before? Never, he says, in this life, but beyond the boundaries in a dream, in a terror of the night, he remembers the eyes that bent over him in pity, and that it was the hand of this stranger who drew him from the pit. He would fain thank the friend, known in a dream alone, for a gift of which his own conscience is the only witness.²

The priest solemnly bids him farewell :—

“‘Thou wilt go on a far and an unknown road. Thou wilt be in the crowd of the great, the rich, the learned. Seek thou the man who knoweth more than they.³ Thou

¹ Disaster overtook the men who had been the chief actors in the persecution in Lithuania. One was killed by lightning, another also perished by sudden death, and signal family misfortunes befell the others. Mickiewicz alludes to this, as we have seen, in his preface to Part III.

² Mickiewicz's faith and interest in dreams come out very strongly in *The Ancestors*.

³ Another prophecy of Towianski's appearance.

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wilt know him, for he will be the first to greet thee in the name of God. Listen to his words.'

"“What is this ? ”” (cries Konrad, startled at the sound of the voice). ““Is it thou ? What may this mean ? Oh, stop one moment—for God’s sake ! ”

““Farewell, I may not,”” (says the priest);

and, hurried on by his guard, Konrad disappears into the shadows.

For we behold Konrad no more, except for one instant as a visitant in no earthly land. It is once more the night of the celebration of the Ancestors. The wizard and the woman before whom years ago Gustavus’s spirit stood in silent reproach are together in the graveyard. The woman — Maryla (Marya Wereszczak)—yearns for the sight of her lover of old. Through the darkness, the songs of the mystic rites are borne to their ears, adjuring the dead to return. Shooting stars, the spirits of the departed, flash about them. Graves burst open, coffins are rent asunder, and horrible corpses of damned flaming souls arise. But Maryla’s lover does not appear. The dawn is at hand, the third cock crows, and the night of the Ancestors is well-nigh run. The wizard and the woman call in vain upon Gustavus’s name.

““Thy lover,”” (says the wizard,) ““hath either changed the faith of his fathers, or hath changed his old name. See how the dawn draws nigh. The wizard’s powers are gone. Thy lover will not come.””

But suddenly to the watchers’ eyes there rises from the west a band of prison carts rushing, amid whirling clouds of snow, to the north. He is there, in mourning garments. He has turned only one look—but

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what a look! — towards Lithuania. A thousand swords have pierced his heart. Only death can deliver him from those wounds inflicted by the enemies of his country. One other—and a deeper —wound is branded as a black star on his forehead. It is the work of his own hand, his blasphemy. Death itself, says the wizard, cannot cure that wound.¹

“ Ah, great God, cure him ! ” cries the woman whom Gustavus had loved, and with these words the drama ends.

Mickiewicz never finished it. Its incomplete state is not only one of those tragedies of literature often met with, but it touches and illustrates the tragedy of its creator’s life. In this play we find the foreshadowing of that strong tendency to exaltation, that overbalancing of the heart against the brain, that strange confused mysticism which finally swept Mickiewicz into labyrinths where his clarion voice was silenced for ever. He once told a friend that Towianski’s tenets were nothing new to him, because he found in them only the climax of beliefs he had always held. Reading *The Ancestors*, it is easy to realise how the false visionary found in Mickiewicz a ripe subject. Mickiewicz had intended to make *The Ancestors* the poetical history of Poland’s sufferings from the partition to the contemporary persecutions under Nicholas I. The scenes we possess

¹ This seems to exemplify the great principles that guided Mickiewicz in his own life and in his work for Poland. To him and to Krasinski the greatest horror of the sufferings inflicted upon Poland by the oppressor was the danger of moral ruin that they brought in their wake.

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were to have merged into the Russian prisons and Siberia. Konrad, whom we have last seen far from the heights to which Mickiewicz meant to have led him victorious, would have depicted the story of Adam's own soul, and have known with the poet a great spiritual re-birth. What a magnificent piece of work the world has lost, what deep seas of sorrow, what splendid peaks of mystic exaltation the poet would have sung with all the powers of his great genius, we know from that part of the play that he finished. "I read the poem on my knees," said Bohdan Zaleski.¹ "Since the tears and the imprecations of the prophets of Sion," George Sand does not hesitate to write, "no voice has been raised with such power to sing a subject so vast as that of a nation's fall."² Dr. Kallenbach likens the noble unfinished drama to Michelangelo's tomb of Julius II., of which only three heroic figures remain to tell the world what it might have been. It is with these grand, yet mournful, monuments of art which their creator's hand failed, from death or from some cause more tragic still, to bring to their perfect fulfilment, that *The Ancestors* stands in the history of literature.

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

² George Sand, *Essai sur le Drame Fantastique*. *Revue des Deux Mondes*. 1830.

CHAPTER V

THE POLISH PILGRIM (1832-1833)

"Go and dwell among the brothers whom I give thee. Ask not for thine own glory, but for the good of those whom I entrust to thee. Go and act, although thy heart should faint in thy bosom, although thou shouldst despair of thy brethren. Act ever and without rest, and thou shalt become the free son of Heaven."

ZYGMUNT KRASINSKI.

THE little band of Polish writers and soldiers in Dresden were soon scattered. In the company of Domeyko, Mickiewicz, bidding a regretful farewell to Stefan Garczynski, started for Paris in the summer of 1832. He chose Paris, because he intended to throw in his lot with that of his brother exiles in France, and because he could publish *The Ancestors* in no country that was within reach of the Russian government. He had scarcely left the scene of his inspiration when the emigrants who had remained behind him were, at the request of Russia, expelled from Saxony. The unhappy Poles of the thirties were indeed to realise that there were few resting-places for their heads on earth.

Mickiewicz reached Paris on the 1st of August, 1832. The famous Polish emigration, those streams of refugees who, after the failure of the Rising, set out from Poland and were scattered over Europe and beyond it, had now begun. This movement was, writes Count Tarnowski, "a veritable exodus from

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the house of bondage."¹ It was composed not only of exiles and of those who had saved themselves by flight after all was lost, but many also who, as far as the Russian government were concerned, might have safely stayed in Poland, went abroad in order to work for the Polish cause. Paris was the chief centre of the emigration. In the Polish colony were to be found men and women of all sorts and conditions of life : soldiers, from famous generals down to boys who had fought for the first time in the Rising ; poets and writers ; ex-ministers of state ; artisans, teachers, doctors, ignorant, learned ;² many condemned to drag out a wretched existence of misery and want ; all drinking the bitter waters of exile and of the sickness of disappointed hope, ever gazing to the land they loved, which not one of them would ever believe that he had looked upon for the last time. Aliens as they were, they lived in constant expectation of Poland's shaking off the yoke and of their own joyful return. How firm was their conviction that they would soon tread their native soil once more may be illustrated by the fact that at that time no Pole in Paris would ever take a house on a lease or bind himself to any settled profession. How should he do so? He considered himself to be in exile but as a bird of passage, awaiting to take flight to the victorious and redeemed country that illuminated the near horizon. Added to this dangerous state of mental tension, of suspense and uncertainty, and to the evils of inactivity, came that

¹ Count Stanislas Tarnowski, *Study on the History of Polish Literature* (Polish). Cracow, 1895.

² *Op. cit.*

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fatal bane of the Polish nation—mutual dissension. It could scarcely be supposed that the Pole could at once rid himself of his traditional tendency to internecine faction, nor of the excessive love of individual independence that had often become in the history of Poland mere political licence. Although each unit in the emigration yearned for Poland's salvation, there was endless disagreement as to the mode by which that salvation should be attained, or on the next step to be taken. The difficulties of the situation are the more comprehensible when we recollect that the Polish colony in Paris consisted of every class and type of Pole, all thrown together for the first time, taught every shade of misfortune by the lesson of their own bitter and hopeless daily life, unhinged by sadness. The tragedies which were the common occurrences of their existence are scarcely possible to be realised by members of a free and prosperous nation. By each post from Russia, the Pole was liable to hear of the confiscation or the ruin of the home of his childhood; of the imprisonment, death, banishment to the living hell of the Siberian mines of those who were dearest to him on earth. The poet, Constantine Gaszynski, for example, received one day the tidings that his mother had been shot dead by Russian soldiers on her own threshold. We find Mickiewicz after his arrival in Paris in ignorance of the fate of one brother and racked by anxiety for another. Families were parted from each other, and either could not tell what had become of their different members, or only knew that they were in direst straits. Cut off from the rest of Europe by the iron wall of the Russian police, parents,

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brothers and sisters still in Poland dared not communicate with their relations and friends beyond the frontier, or else could only do so with elaborate precautions under heavy risk.

Mickiewicz then found himself plunged into a clamour and chaos, a strife of tongues, a pit of misery. Life under these circumstances was almost intolerable to a man whose strong soul was on fire with the purest and loftiest ideals, and which, itself attuned to a winning sweetness and gentleness, loathed anger, jealousy and contention. Receiving all personal attacks in dignified, if deeply pained, silence, he lived apart from the war of words, and spent sleepless nights seeking in the distress of his heart how to bring about that great moral regeneration of the individual Pole upon which, so he believed, depended the resurrection of the nation. But not for that did he cease to labour for his fellow-exiles to whom his life was henceforth dedicated. Insisting that all work done in their behalf must be of a practical nature, he willingly took upon himself any business that could really profit the emigration. Later on he assisted in the foundation of Polish schools and Polish beneficent institutions in Paris that exist to this day. Out of his own poverty he generously gave money that he himself desperately needed into the hand of some brother Pole even worse off than he was. Pressing cares and anxieties of his own weighed upon his mind at the same time. He wrote to his brother, Francis, whose lot in Prussian Poland, whence he was liable at any moment to be driven forth without any resources, filled Mickiewicz with apprehensions: "I have had many private dis-

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agreeables and troubles, so heavy that I fell ill."¹ Then in the midst of personal and public trials would come news from Poland that effectually struck mourning to the heart of every Pole.

"I will not speak to you of my moral state," such is the cry of sorrow that Mickiewicz poured out to the ear of a dear friend during that terrible winter of 1832; and it is characteristic of his large-hearted and wide-minded nature that it is to a Russian lady that this letter is addressed. "You know what is happening in my country. I read lately in the *Petersburg Gazette* the ukase which orders five thousand noble families to be torn away from every province of Lithuania, and to be transported to the Caucasus. Here we are more than six thousand refugees, for the most part young men, of good family, and at present almost without daily bread and with no hope for the future. We trust in God. I am busy with literary work, writing and publishing with feverish heat. This keeps me from going mad."²

In the December of this year, 1832, the poet published the result of many vigils and of much searching of heart, *The Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrimage*. He wrote them for his exiled compatriots and for them alone. Curious and interesting as a confession of Mickiewicz's national policy—if that word may be given to what was in reality a form of mysticism—this slender prose volume will not

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz*. Letter to Francis Mickiewicz, 1832.

² *Ibid.*, Letter to Mme. de Klustine, November 24, 1832, (original in French). This lady had been one of the closest friends that Mickiewicz had made in Rome.

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as a whole appeal to any reader outside the Polish nation, and not even to the present generation in Poland. So it is said. Yet it won the admiration of brilliant French men of letters in Mickiewicz's lifetime. Michelet, Victor Hugo, and Ballanche praised it. Montalembert translated it into French, and Lamennais founded the style and some of the ideas of *Les Paroles d'un Croyant* upon the Polish work. The Polish poets contemporary with Mickiewicz—Bohdan Zaleski, Garczynski, and he whose words carried more weight than theirs, Zygmunt Krasinski—spoke of it in enthusiastic terms. "Mickiewicz is even finer as a man than a poet," wrote Krasinski after reading the book. "He only knows what consecration is."¹ But the strongest proof that the words of Poland's greatest poet have lived beyond his life is the fact that in the late Russo-Japanese war, *The Book of the Polish Pilgrimage* was found on the dead bodies of the Polish soldiers, pathetic testimony to the undying love for their country of the sons of Poland who fell by thousands in a quarrel not their own.²

Mickiewicz had now become, in Dr. Kallenbach's expression, "the spiritual leader" of his nation. That single-heartedness with which he laboured for the noble ideal to which his life was consecrated; the great qualities of his soul and mind and genius; his scorn of all that was ignoble and unworthy, linked to his personal fascination; all these had combined to single him out as the man to whom all Poland looked

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² *Bulletin Polonais*, June 15, 1905, quoted by M. Gabriel Sarrazin, in his *Les Grands Poètes Romantiques de la Pologne*.

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for guidance. Out of long contest, he had, even as Krasinski's *Irydion*, risen in renewed strength to carry the sorrows of thousands in his one heart; like his Konrad, he stands out as Million, because he loved and suffered for millions. To him, of all men, was granted the gift so passionately implored by Konrad, that of ruling souls by love.¹ Deeply impressed by the conviction that the obstacle to the restoration of Poland lay, not in the strength of her enemies but in the Poles themselves, and that their hopes were in Heaven's aid, not in any turn of politics, Mickiewicz felt himself called to embody his teaching in an enduring shape. In order to invest his message to the emigration with more solemnity, he wrote *The Book of the Polish Pilgrimage* in Biblical form. Poetic prose was a mode of expression used by all the three great Polish poets. The finest specimen is Słowacki's exquisite mystical journey in Siberia, his *Anhelli*, which has a touch of Biblical style likewise.

With a certain lofty scorn, Mickiewicz, in his preface to *The Book of the Polish Pilgrimage*, repudiates the name of either exile or refugee for his compatriots. They were pilgrims—pilgrims who were travelling to the Holy Land of liberty, and who had bound themselves by vow never to halt in that hard journey till they reached the harbour of their desire. In view

¹ As an example of the love and admiration felt for Mickiewicz by his compatriots, we may cite an address sent to him on his arrival in Paris by a colony of young Poles in Besançon, and given by Mr. Ladislas Mickiewicz in his biography of the poet. They thanked him for coming "to gild with the star of hope the hearts that pined for their country and their families."

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of the many perils that beset their way, he therefore wrote what the emigration called “The Gospel of Mickiewicz,” a collection of little parables and aphorisms to guide and guard them on the road, and which, says he in the same preface, “a Christian pilgrim has gathered from the lips and writings of Christian Poles, martyrs and pilgrims.” In allegories and fables he warns them against their mutual dissensions, against the lust of distinction and of power. He holds out before their eyes the great vocation to which Poland was called, and which could only be realised by their own individual moral worth. They must walk worthy of their great destiny. No stain must disfigure the shield of the Polish pilgrim, because his warfare is for the holy cause of universal liberty, for the Christianisation of Governments, and to promote brotherly love between them. These ends that Mickiewicz preached on all occasions were the passionately longed-for dreams of his heart. Some quotations from a work extremely difficult to render palatable to an English reader unacquainted with the doctrines of Mesyanism, with which the whole of this curious book is impregnated, will, perhaps, be the best mode in which to convey a rough idea of its substance.

The sufferings of Poland were to give birth to the freedom of the world ; and “ye will be raised from the dead,” not because you are the sons of a once mighty and a wise nation, for both Rome and Greece have fallen, but because “ye believe, love, and hope.” The first tale is that of a great fleet of warships that foundered in the tempest because the sailors mutinied and destroyed the chart and the compass. But the

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little fishing-boat, guided by stars and the magnetic needle, reaches the shore.

“The greatness and the strength of the warships are good, but without stars and compass they are nought.

“And the star of the pilgrimage is heavenly faith, and the magnetic needle is the love of our country.

“The star shines for all, and the needle points ever to the north. And of a surety, with that compass, we may sail on the east and western seas, and, without it, even on the northern sea there will be wandering and shipwreck.

“So with faith and love the bark of the Polish pilgrim shall sail, and without faith and love the warlike and the mighty nations shall wander and shall founder.

“Oh, Polish pilgrim, thou wert once rich ; and lo ! thou sufferest poverty and want, that thou mayest know what are poverty and want, and that thou shalt say when thou returnest to thy country : ‘The poor and the wretched are my co-heirs.’”

The sorrows of exile are to teach the Pole when he is restored to Poland that equal justice for the foreigner dwelling in his land which had been denied to himself in his wandering. He will also have been taught brotherhood with the ignorant and unlearned. For what had his own learning availed him when he starved in banishment?

The Polish pilgrim’s ideals of civilisation must not be the surface and material civilisation which expresses itself in material comforts and culture. No, his are to be the great and Christian ideals of true citizenship which unite the old Roman teaching of self-immolation for the state to the Christian precept of consecration for one’s fellow-men. To this idea of self-sacrifice Mickiewicz returns again and again.

“The Son of God, Jesus Christ,” (he writes in *The Book of the Polish Nation*,) “came on earth teaching men that all are brothers of one family, children of one God: and that he is

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the greatest among men who serveth them and who sacrificeth himself for their good. And he who is the best of them must the more sacrifice himself for them. And Christ being the best of all, sacrificed His blood for them in the most cruel torments."

"The wise among you," (he goes on in *The Book of the Polish Pilgrimage*,) "are not those who have grown rich by selling their wisdom, and who have bought for themselves goods and houses, and have won gold and honours from kings.

"But they who have announced to you the word of liberty, and have suffered imprisonment and scourging; and they who seal their teaching by their death shall be blessed."

To Mickiewicz, that most idealistic of men, it seemed as though the material power, governments ruling by brute strength and not by the great principles of Christian brotherhood, were to be soon swept away by the mightier power of love and faith. "The world lays its hopes on the nations that have faith, that are filled with love and hope." Filled with foreboding lest the influences of a materialistic age, the spectacle of physical and mental ease, should destroy that hunger and thirst after a greater aim which devoured his own life, and which he would fain see in the heart of every Pole, he cries out: "Verily I say unto you: ye must not learn civilisation from alien nations, but ye must teach them the true Christian civilisation."

Then he urges his countrymen to labour with their hands—a work which the Polish nobles of that day despised—even as the first Apostles did, but to remember with the pioneers of Christianity that a tentmaker was primarily a Paul.

Very characteristic of Mickiewicz is the moral following this little parable. He tells a story of a district in Italy where malaria was stamped out by

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those who boldly left their houses to drain a pestilential marsh, while the others, who took every remedy except that of going to the root of the evil, perished.

“For to that man who goeth not forth from his house to find evil and to blot it out from the face of the earth, will befall that evil itself will go forth to meet him and will stand before his face.”

Wearied, distracted, by the din of wrangling, the poet implores his countrymen to carry in mind that if only they will remember that they are together, sheep of the same fold, among strangers, there will be peace among them. The unworthy Pole is as the deserter from the ranks, the sheep straying from the flock to the reach of the wolf. And the enemy and the wolf are not only those who have destroyed their nation, but equally any man who worships power and self-interest. The Polish pilgrim must forbear from crying out on the faults of others, for judgment is to the judge alone, and punishment to the executioner. The fool, adds this profound reader of character, will always see the fault in the picture, but the connoisseur only perceives its perfections. He rounds off with a delightful aphorism to the effect that when good men sit in judgment on others, they begin by considering the good side of those they judge.

The lesson of brotherly harmony is one that he reiterates without ceasing.

“God giveth victory, using the swiftness of one, the courage of another, the strength of a third; and if the skilful or the strong man, instead of carrying his weaker comrade to the height, thrusteth him down, then he breaketh confusion and defeat; and if he boasteth of his merits, he soweth discord.”

So does he end the allegory of the storming of a

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town where the besiegers, struggling up one ladder, trample on each other and are slain ; but on the other, the strong man, helping up his wounded fellow-soldier, reaches the ramparts and plants the flag of victory.

Mickiewicz was in many ways eminently practical. No time was to be wasted in dreams or in fruitless regret. He urged his brother exiles not to occupy their minds in meditating on bygone sins and errors. Each must prepare for his great future, and he must think only of his past, inasmuch as this helps him to lead a better life. Mickiewicz also frequently descends into minute personal details. For example, he begs the old Polish soldiers not to wear the dress of foreigners but to cling to their national dress. He lays down rules for the keeping of the national feasts and the anniversaries of the Rising. On those days, the Poles shall visit the church in the morning, fast all day, and give the money saved from their meals to the patriotic funds. They must always live frugally and dress simply, because all that is left over must be dedicated to the cause of Poland. The Pole must be merciful to others, severe on himself. Each son of Poland must give his talent to his country, silently, unostentatiously, like gifts to the corbona. His personal desires must be sacrificed to the common weal.

“Sow ye the love of your native land and the spirit of self-sacrifice, and be certain that the Commonwealth will grow again, mighty and fair. . . . Each one of you”—and here we have one of the most fundamental principles of the whole of our poet's own life and of his apostolate to his nation—“Each one of you hath within his soul the seed of the nation's future laws and the measures of her future boundaries.”

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Begging his countrymen not to dispute, as they were given to do, as to the future government of freed Poland or the details of her boundaries :

“ As much as you make your own souls greater and better, so much will ye better your laws and enlarge your boundaries.”

“ Ye are in your pilgrimage in a strange land like God’s people in the desert : ”

and he bids the Poles to refrain from lamentations and from doubt, so that the days of their wandering may not be prolonged. For the Israelites who doubted died in the desert without beholding the Promised Land, and the same fate shall befall the exiled children of Poland who murmur and despair even in the secret of their heart.

Such are some of the spiritual exercises laid down by the great Pole ; a handful of jewels selected from a whole that is not always equally admirable. Count Tarnowski observes that when Mickiewicz speaks to his fellow-pilgrims on moral questions affecting their national character he is great, but, when he treats of international topics and of the relation of Poland to the other members of the European family, the weak side of his mental outlook is apparent.¹ There is a sort of national Pharisaical strain running through *The Book of the Polish Pilgrimage*, a contempt, in some cases a hatred, of other nations, that at first sight is very difficult to reconcile with the nobler part of Mickiewicz’s nature,² or with the high ideas that he not only felt called upon to preach to his countrymen, but that he consistently carried out into practice himself.

¹ Count Stanislas Tarnowski, *Study for the History of Polish Literature.*

² *Op. cit.*

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“The worst among you,” he will say in one place, “is better than a good alien, for each of you hath the spirit of self-sacrifice.” “Ye have not to learn civilisation”—we have already seen what Mickiewicz understood by the term—“of strangers, but ye must teach them the true Christian civilisation.” “Ye are among strangers like the Apostles amid idolaters;” and as Christ and the religion which He had founded rose among the Jews, even so in the midst of the materialistic cities of Europe shall rise the New Testament of the Poles, that of love and sacrifice. At times he turns the very words of the New Testament into texts relating to Poland and to his political faith in a manner that cannot fail to be repugnant to Christian readers.

But let us consider a moment the position and the outlook on life of the man, and the real significance of *The Book of the Polish Pilgrimage* in the psychological history of Mickiewicz will strike us with its intense pathos. He had come to Paris purified from bitterness and from all desire of revenge. He had known the despair and the revolt of Konrad,¹ but these lay behind him even as the billows beat with no sound of terror to the ear of one who has reached harbour after battling with a stormy sea. His soul walked in light. He believed that he had discovered the key to that terrible enigma that tormented the Poles of his generation, and beneath which the great mystic Krasinski sank for years into abysses of negation and despair. He had found to his own satisfaction the reason—and the noblest of reasons—for Poland’s

¹ Count Stanislas Tarnowski, *Study for the History of Polish Literature*.

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unparalleled misfortunes. His nation, said he with Krasinski, who reached the same point by an independent process, was the victim immolated for the sake of the world. At the cost of her pain, the new world, the regenerated world where governments shall rule in Christ with Christian love, was to be born. In this theory Mickiewicz's soul found perfect peace, the solution of all difficulty. This ideal depended upon the individual heroism, self-sacrifice and moral height of each Pole. In his scheme it was no miracle that was needed but Christian humility and a right understanding of the mysteries of Christ's life and teaching as set forth in the Gospels. The exiles must therefore live in purity of life and united with one another in one faith and one deathless hope.¹ Upon these things depended the resurrection of the nation.

Here we have at once the explanation of much of what in Mickiewicz's writings takes at times a form that would otherwise seem well-nigh idealism gone astray. He took up life in Paris under the mastery of this thought. His countrymen, living up to so lofty a destiny, were to be apostles. The emigration was in his eyes positively a sacred and a holy movement ; its members were providentially scattered through the world to disseminate these spiritual tenets and the love of sacrifice in a materialistic age. As Israel of old, they were a chosen people, a race set apart and consecrated. What rude shocks, what rough awakenings this great idealist and mystic whose soul was tuned too high either for his century or the world in which he lived was doomed to suffer, is not the least sad feature of his

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*
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troubled life. And yet in that one respect the heart of this man, whose hair was whitened by grief and care before its time, remained eternally young. No disillusion, no disappointment, not even the weary daily lessons of prosaic reality, ever destroyed his faith in his ideal or caused him to halt in his journey to the stars.

The Book of the Polish Pilgrimage is written with no attempt at ornamentation but with a simplicity of style that Mickiewicz thought best suited to his purpose : but, as he finished it, it is as though he could no longer contain the passion and the anguish of his soul, and he pours out the *Prayer* and the *Litany of the Pilgrim* that close the book.

THE PRAYER OF THE PILGRIM

“Lord God, Who canst do all things ! The children of a warrior nation lift to Thee their disarmed hands from all the ends of the world. They cry to Thee from the depths of the mines of Siberia, and from the snows of Kamchatka, and from the deserts of Algeria, and from France, a foreign land.¹ But in our own fatherland, in Poland, faithful to Thee, they may not cry to Thee ;² and our aged men, our women and our children pray to Thee in secret, with their thoughts and tears. God of the Jagiellos ! God of Sobieski ! God of Kościuszko ! have pity on our country and on us. Grant us to pray again to Thee as our fathers prayed, on the battlefield with weapons in our hands, before an altar made of drums and cannons, beneath a canopy of our eagles and our flags. And grant unto our families to pray in the churches

¹ Kamchatka was, and still is, one of the chief penal settlements for the Pole. The reference to Algeria is on account of the numbers of Poles who, since the days of the Polish legions under Napoleon or after the Rising of 1830, served in the French Foreign Legion.

² Religious persecution has always gone hand in hand with that of the Polish nationality in Russian Poland.

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of our towns and hamlets, and to our children to pray upon our graves. But let not our will but Thine be done. Amen."

"LITANY OF THE PILGRIM

"Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison.

"God the Father Who didst lead Thy people forth from the captivity of Egypt and didst restore them to the Holy Land,

"Restore us to our native land.

"God the Son, Redeemer, Who wert tortured and crucified, Who didst rise again from the dead and Who reignest in glory,

"Raise our country from the dead.

"Mother of God, whom our fathers called the Queen of Poland and of Lithuania,¹

"Save Poland and Lithuania.

"Saint Stanislas, patron of Poland,

"Pray for us.

"Saint Casimir, patron of Lithuania,

"Pray for us.

"Saint Josaphat, patron of Ruthenia,

"Pray for us.

"All ye holy patrons of our Republic,

"Pray for us.

"From Russian, Austrian and Prussian bondage,

"Deliver us, oh Lord.

"By the martyrdom of thirty thousand knights of Bar, who died for faith and freedom,²

"Deliver us, oh Lord.

"By the martyrdom of twenty thousand citizens of Praga, slaughtered for faith and freedom,³

"Deliver us, oh Lord.

¹ The title which the Poles, to this day, give the Blessed Virgin.

² The Confederation of Bar, which strove to save Poland from being partitioned.

³ The terrible butchery that took place at the storming of Warsaw, of which Praga was a suburb, under Suvorov.

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“By the martyrdom of the youths of Lithuania, slain by the knout, dead in the mines and in exile,

“Deliver us, oh Lord.

“By the martyrdom of the people of Oszmiana, slaughtered in God’s churches and in their homes,¹

“Deliver us, oh Lord.

“By the martyrdom of the soldiers, murdered in Fischau by the Prussians,²

“Deliver us, oh Lord.

“By the martyrdom of the soldiers, knouted to death in Kronstadt by the Russians,³

“Deliver us, oh Lord.

“By the wounds, tears and sufferings of all the Polish prisoners, exiles and pilgrims,

“Deliver us, oh Lord.

“For a universal war for the freedom of the nations,

“We beseech Thee, oh Lord.

“For the national arms and eagles,

“We beseech Thee, oh Lord.

“For a happy death on the field of battle,

“We beseech Thee, oh Lord.

“For a grave for our bones in our own earth, .

“We beseech Thee, oh Lord.

“For the independence, integrity and freedom of our country,

“We beseech Thee, oh Lord.”

At the peril of those who were responsible for in-

¹ During the Rising of 1830, the Russians fell upon Oszmiana while the inhabitants were in church, and slew men, women, and children alike.

² At Fischau a band of disarmed Polish soldiers who had retreated into Prussia were shot down in cold blood by the Prussians on January 27, 1832.

³ Numbers of Polish soldiers were condemned to work at the fortifications of Kronstadt, with heads shaved as convicts, under a cold of twenty-five degrees Réaumur. Those who refused to swear allegiance to the Tsar were flogged to death under conditions of peculiar barbarity.

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troducing them, *The Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrimage* penetrated even into Russian Poland. Mickiewicz was soon given a proof that they opened a way of light to his brother-Poles languishing beneath Russian oppression. A letter from an unknown Pole was put one day into his hand. It had been smuggled past the Russian frontier by somebody courageous enough to face the danger of discovery.

"By your *Books of the Polish Nation*," it runs, "you have placed yourself at the head of the Polish pilgrims. You have thereby chosen the great calling of the leadership of the chosen people in the desert, and you have taken upon yourself the duty of seeking the shortest and the surest roads leading to salvation. I bless your calling, and that spirit which has discovered to you the sanctuary of the predestinies of the human race that is still hidden for a long time to many in the distance. Your heart dwells in the midst of anguish and misery, and your gaze reaches from the boundary of Europe near Africa to us and even to the Siberian mines, where our brothers water with tears the ore with which the Tsar pays his hirelings that hunt us down on all sides. That is the reason why I am writing to you, and why I command to you the fulfilment of a great work. You see how the Herod of the North is murdering and slaying the souls of the children, that in them he may strike those who are to be the saviours and the redeemers of the Polish people. When you see this, you, as a good shepherd, ought to sacrifice everything to save from spiritual destruction at least those whom God calls as the future prophets and lawgivers of His people. Now in these days

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the conviction is almost universal that the spirit of Poland has gone abroad, and on the third day will return to the body. Without the spirit all flesh is dead and cannot show the effects of life. Strive in common with others that this spirit not only shall not die with all of you, but that it may, on the contrary, grow ever more and give life to succeeding generations.”¹

Wearied with the clamour of tongues, oppressed by the noise and bustle of the Paris which all his life he hated, Mickiewicz mentally withdrew his soul into the Lithuanian forests for which his sick heart yearned, and wandered through their cool, green solitudes as he wrote *Thaddeus*. He lived in solitude, except for the society of a few chosen friends, of one especially whom he had met for the first time since his arrival in Paris, Bohdan Zaleski. Zaleski, the leader of what is known in Polish literature as the Ukraine school of poetry, knew no less than Mickiewicz what it was to pine in vain for the loved scenes of youth. All through his work—which in the Polish poetry of his age stands second only to that of Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Krasinski—there flows a minor melody of passionate longing for the wild steppes of the Ukraine that had nursed his boyhood, and which had faded into an everlasting past. In the opening verses of his most famous poem, the beautiful and ethereal *Spirit of the Steppe*, he sings how the Mother Ukraine cradled him, her son, on song on her bosom: how she, the enchantress, in the aerial dawn gave the child to the spirit-maidens of Ukrainian legend to nurse with the mil-

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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of dreams and flowers, to be lulled to slumber with the colours of the rainbow. To Zaleski, breathing as he did of romantic song and legend, Mickiewicz would betake himself for, as he said, "rest and fresh air" as a relief in his difficult life.¹ At this time the two friends spent most of their evenings alone together in Adam's rooms.

"We love each other," wrote Bohdan, "like born brothers who have learnt to know each other in exile, in misfortune and loneliness. As surely as the world is great, he is a miraculous poet and man."²

And he tells how directly they met each other their souls were knit together. The sympathetic and attractive personality of Bohdan Zaleski henceforth holds a large place in Mickiewicz's life. Through the alienation that in after years rose between them, Zaleski still clung in his heart to the man whom he ever loved and admired; and it was he who at the grave of Mickiewicz uttered the farewell of the whole nation to her greatest poet. Unlike the majority of the Polish poets contemporaneous with him, Zaleski, living to extreme old age, knew the grief of outliving every one who had been dear to him. More than thirty years after the death of Mickiewicz, bereft, blind and lonely, he died in 1886, after a blameless and pure life.³

Towards the end of 1832, a fresh grief fell upon Mickiewicz. News reached him of the failing health of Stefan Garczynski. Dread for the life of his dearest

¹ St. Zdziarski, *Bohdan Zaleski* (Polish.) Lemberg.

² L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

³ St. Zdziarski, *op. cit.*

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friend robbed him of sleep by night and haunted him by day. "I feel poetical inspiration," he wrote to Odyniec, alluding to *Thaddeus*, on which he was then engaged. But after mentioning how troubles of all sorts were paralysing him, he adds that Garczynski's illness—it was consumption—was a new and a terrible blow, and that he was weary of a world so full of sorrow. Garczynski, he writes in a later letter, is one of those men who are necessary in this life. And yet whatever his grief and anxiety, Mickiewicz would never allow himself, or those with whom he had anything to do, to look forward with dread to the morrow.

"For shame, Edward!" he writes in the first part of the above-quoted letter to the newly-married Odyniec, on hearing that his friend disquieted himself with thoughts of the future. "You have not profited from my company. When did you ever see me thinking about the future? If I had a loving wife, I do not think that I should think even about the next hour, but I should rest entirely in the present."¹

To his brother, Francis, he wrote more seriously on the same subject:—

"I see that you will not soon reconcile yourself to your fate, and that you are not as yet accustomed to be sick with yearning, which sickness certainly lasts always, but which also has its crisis, its high-water mark, and then becomes a chronic, slow disease. I know no way in which I can in any way hammer out of your head anxiety for the future. Reflect that

¹ Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to Edward Odyniec, December 8, 1832.

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the future cannot be worse, and changing can only better it."¹

In this winter and spring Mickiewicz busied himself in preparing Garczynski's poems for the press. He went through the manuscripts as the dying youth sent them to him, improving and pruning them : found a publisher ; tried to secure the book a favourable hearing ; corrected the proofs ; offered out of his own scanty finances to advance the expenses of printing ; did anything and everything, so that Garczynski might have the joy he longed for of seeing his poems printed. Mickiewicz was always, when his conscience permitted, a generous critic and helper to young poets.

"I read certain parts to one of my friends," he wrote to Garczynski. "They struck him more than my new *Ancestors*. . . . I was never capable of feeling jealousy of another poet, but it seems to me that if *Wacław* were not yours, then I might perhaps envy the author." Now I love it as if it were our common child." "I am glad beyond measure," he says characteristically in the same letter, "that even under the moral aspect it will have a salutary effect."²

It is pathetic to read letter after letter full of friendly and literary advice and encouragement, devoted to this same subject, describing to the dying young soldier-poet every detail of the progress of the book that it was doubtful whether he would ever see,

¹ *Op. cit.* Letter to Francis Mickiewicz, January 7, 1833.

² It is hardly necessary to observe that Garczynski's literary gifts cannot be named in the same breath as those of Mickiewicz.

³ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Stefan Garczynski, January 12, 1833.

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and on whose appearance his whole heart was set. To his own work Mickiewicz always alludes very sparingly in his correspondence, and, when he mentions it at all, generally passes it by with a brief, almost careless, allusion. He was scarcely ever heard to speak of his writings, and was curiously indifferent to literary fame.

"Do not worry about the opinion of the public," he says in one of these letters to Garczynski. "How I wish I could make you feel half of my indifference to it!" and he goes on to describe the attacks that he had suffered in the press which, while they angered his friends, only amused the author. Garczynski sends him a hymn. Adam's praises are mingled with gentle reproach for the injury that this literary effort had cost its author's weakened frame. Again :—

"What I wrote about my labour over the proofs and my boasting about it was only a joke. How could you take it seriously? Believe me that the proofs often gave me great pleasure, for they made me feel as if I were talking to your soul, sometimes disputing, wrangling, and always as in real life parting in harmony."

Then he closes the last letter that he ever wrote to his friend by affectionate praise of his work.¹

Only want of means and the difficulties in the way of the passports kept Mickiewicz from Garczynski's side. At this sad time, he turned to his *Thaddeus* for comfort. He said that while he wrote it, it seemed to him as though he were again in Lithuania,

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letters to Stefan Garczynski, March 5, May, 1833.*

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and her husband joined the ranks of the emigration, her whole life was spent in the service of her suffering fellow-Poles.

"She reconciles me to the human race," wrote Mickiewicz to Domeyko from Garczynski's side, "and she can inspire faith once more in virtue and goodness on this earth. She looks as if she had only two hours more of life left to her, and yet she always finds enough strength to help others. She is soon leaving here, and then I do not know what will become of us."¹

She returned a few days before Garczynski's death, so that Adam could write that she had "sweetened his friend's last moments on earth."

Claudia Potocka on her side wrote of Mickiewicz :—

"He does not leave Stefan by day or night. I gaze at him with admiration and with tears. He is beyond all of us, in heart, virtue, soul."²

A year after Garczynski's death, Claudia Potocka stood at his grave in Avignon, where his body lies under the Latin epitaph written by Mickiewicz. She sent the latter a little leaf gathered from this place of memories, folded in a piece of paper, with the inscription :

"On All Souls' Day, November, 1834.—Avignon."

This memento of a double friendship, in both cases hallowed by death, for Claudia Potocka died herself a few years later than Garczynski, Mickiewicz kept as a treasure to his last hour.³

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Ignacy Domeyko, July 8, 1833.

² M. Zdziechowski, *Mesyanists and Slavophiles.*

³ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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Garczynski's poetical gifts were of a minor order : but that he must have been possessed of some quite unusual charm is certain from the language of almost rapturous admiration and love expressed for him by all who knew him, including two personalities as noble as those of Claudia Potocka and Mickiewicz. Claudia Potocka wrote that nothing could atone to her for Stefan's loss, that her one comfort was that God had permitted her to know him and to have been able to console him in some of his darkest moments.¹ Odyniec, writing to Mickiewicz a heart-broken letter after Claudia Potocka had passed from the earth, in which he says that she had been the guiding star by which he directed his life, added that it would be hard to find in this world two people equal to either Claudia or to the dead Garczynski.² As for Mickiewicz, Garczynski's death was not only one of the bitterest griefs he ever suffered, but it left deep traces that for years remained unhealed. He said that it was only his having come across Towianski and his teaching that saved him from dying of sorrow at the loss of this friend : yet when Towianski first sought out Mickiewicz, Garczynski had lain eight years in his grave. It has even been stated that the anguish of his bereavement was one of the causes that paralysed Mickiewicz's poetic genius in the prime of his manhood ; and though this scarcely seems probable, considering that the poet wrote the greater part of that brilliant poem *Thaddeus* after Garczynski's

¹ M. Zdziechowski, *Mesyanists and Slavophiles*.

² Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter from Edward Odyniec, June 25, 1836.

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death, the fact is worthy of notice as another illustration of the profound impression made upon Adam's soul by the death of his most cherished friend.

Worn out, mentally and physically, Mickiewicz went back to Paris. He felt, so he told Domeyko, like one of the French soldiers he had watched in his childhood, returning with the remnants of the Grand Army from Russia, shattered and demoralised. But soon he was able to take up again his best-loved poem and—to the irreparable loss of Polish literature—his last.

CHAPTER VI

THADDEUS (1834)

“Knowest thou the love which eternally lures the soul into the land of memory? Does the cry of the angel of home call thee by night, and bid thine eyes gaze on the living faces of those long dead?”—*ZYGMUNT KRASINSKI.*

UNDER circumstances that would have seemed calculated rather to benumb the creative powers of a genius struggling against bitter fate than to produce a great masterpiece, Mickiewicz wrote the epic that is the most famous of all his poems, *Thaddeus*. For the flawless workmanship throughout its twelve cantos, and the brilliance of its style and colouring, this poem, said to be the greatest epic of the nineteenth century, is, from an artistic point of view, Mickiewicz's finest production. Oppressed by poverty and by the sorrow of his exile; filled with grief for his country and for his dead friend; distracted by the difficulties and cares of the emigration;—this was the poet's mental position as he was writing *Thaddeus*. On his return from Garczynski's death-bed, Mickiewicz took up the poem where he had left it. In mortal sadness he wrote a poem of Arcady—of a “Lithuanian Arcady”¹;—in which, albeit at times the sighs of the exile mingle with the murmurs of the forest and the cries of the birds of the marsh, the

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz.*

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general impression is that of a golden tranquillity and peace, broadening as the work closes into a splendour of joyful and high hopes.

And yet the very fact of the rude combat of its author's life explains the tone of *Thaddeus*. With a keen remembrance of the dangers of the frivolous salons where he had been a guest in Russia, Mickiewicz at this time shunned society,¹ and betook himself to the song of his lost country and his departed happiness as to his refuge and his ark of consolation amidst the troubles and the toils of his daily lot. "Poetry," he told his friend Hieronim Kajsiewicz, "always transports me into my youth, and tears me from my actual misery."² And, as he wrote his *Thaddeus*, his sorrows for one enchanted moment passed from him, and in the land of dreams and memory—the only country left to the Pole—he was free to wander. The man who, at the age of thirty-six, was already worn and weary, looked into his faithful memory and sang for future generations the happy scenes of his boyhood, all steeped in the glad and tender light of youth. "*Thaddeus*," says Dr. Kallenbach, "is eternally young."³ With perhaps the exception of the cantos describing the foray—and these are not in the least harrowing—and of those passages in which the grief of the exile uncontrollably breaks forth, there is nothing of storm or tragedy in *Thaddeus*. All is peace. To a mind jaded like

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to Hieronim Kajsiewicz, October, 1833.

³ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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Mickiewicz's, not only with the deeper trials of life, but also with harassing and hourly cares, the withdrawal of his soul into far-off and brighter surroundings meant respite from cruel reality. With such a master-hand does he paint those pictures of country life, of forests and sunset skies, where his own racked heart found rest, that a blessed sense of repose steals even over the reader as he turns the pages. It was for this very purpose that the poet wrote the book. He intended it as a solace for his Polish companions in misfortune, to whom the face of grief was over familiar, and whose lives tragedy touched so often and so deeply that it was unnecessary to write songs of sorrow for their sake, because they lived them in their own persons.¹ In some verses, meant to serve as an introduction to *Thaddeus*, and which were found among the poet's manuscripts after his death, Mickiewicz confesses that, surrounded by a generation in mourning under a sky dark with curses, his heart failed him at the thought of the tears and blood in which his nation was drowned, and that, like a bird of slender wing, he passed by the sphere of tempest to seek calm beneath the shade of the trees.

"To-day for us, uninvited guests in the wide world, there is one country alone in all the past and all the future where the Pole can find one spark of joy: the country of our childish years! That land will remain ever holy and pure, like the first love, undisturbed by the remembrance of error, not undermined by the deception of hope, unchanged by the flood of events."

Heartsick and homesick, he tells how he was fain

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewics.*

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to visit in thought that land where tears were seldom shed, where bitterness was not; where he lived like a child that wanders in meadows where no poisonous, but only sweet and fair, flowers blow; where mother, brothers, kindred, with all that he loved, were around him instead of strangers.

The first word with which Mickiewicz opens his great national epic is that which was the keynote of his life:—

“Lithuania, my country! Thou art like health. How much to prize thee he only can know who hath lost thee. Now the whole charm of thy beauty I see and I sing, for I pine after thee.

“Holy Virgin, who dost guard bright Czenstochowa, and who shinest over the Ostrian gate!¹ Thou who dost defend the castled town of Nowogródek with her faithful people! Even as by a miracle thou didst restore me when a child to health (when I was offered to thy protection by my weeping mother, and I opened my dying eyes, and went on foot to thy shrine to thank God for my recovered life); even so thou wilt restore us by a miracle to the bosom of our land!² Till

¹ The Madonna of Czenstochowa is a favourite theme in Polish art and in the great works of Polish literature. Not only Mickiewicz, but both Krasinski and that fine poet, Kornel Ujejski, have used it with signal effect. Around this shrine of the Blessed Virgin, so popular in Poland that it might be called the Polish Lourdes, have centred many of the nation's most sacred traditions and aspirations. When all Poland was powerless against the invasion of the Swedes in 1649, it was at Czenstochowa that the Poles, headed by the prior Kordecki, rallied and saved the country. Sienkiewicz's handling of this episode in his historical novel, *The Deluge*, is memorable.

The Ostrian gate at Wilna and Nowogródek are both shrines of the Blessed Virgin.

² This invocation is one of Mickiewicz's most famous passages. Bohdan Zaleski, slightly paraphrasing it, quoted it in his funeral oration over the poet's coffin.

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then, carry my yearning soul to those wooded hills, those green meadows stretching wide on the shores of the blue Niemen; to those fields painted with many-hued corns, golden with wheat, silver with rye; where grow the amber rape and buckwheat white as snow, where with a maiden blush the medick flames, and all is girdled round, as with a ribbon, by a green ridge where sparse calm pear-trees sit."

The story of *Thaddeus* is a very slight one. The scene is laid in the years of Mickiewicz's childhood. The hero, or rather the boy who gives his name to the book, comes back to the home of his uncle, Judge Soplica, after his education is finished. This uncle and Thaddeus are the representatives of a house that is at feud, more or less, over the possession of a ruined castle with another family, of which the last scion is a Frenchified young Count, a devotee of foreign fashions, his head full of sentimental and romantic ideas, a rather silly but quite estimable youth.] He is painted with that gentle humour which runs through the poem. At first the quarrel does not assume serious proportions, and in fact the Count is a guest beneath the Judge's roof; but behind it there lurks a domestic tragedy. The Judge had a brother, Jacek (Thaddeus's father), who, in his youth before he married Thaddeus's mother, had been a suitor for the hand of the magnate Horeszko's daughter, Eva. One day, while Jacek sat at the table of the Horeszkos, a dish of dark soup was served to him which, according to Polish custom, signified that his suit was rejected.¹ Vowing eternal

¹ Jacek's love for this Eva is intended by Mickiewicz to be his own love-story with Henryka. The magnate in the poem stands for Henryka's father. Mickiewicz sent *Thaddeus* to Henryka with all the passages about Eva marked. J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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vengeance, Jacek gave himself up to a wild life, and then joined the Russians during Kościuszko's war. With a band of Russian soldiers he attacked Horęszko's dwelling, and the magnate fell dead at his hand. He then fled abroad to atone for his crimes by fighting under the flags of the Polish legions, and finally to take the cowl of a Capuchin. Known as the monk Robak, but with his identity concealed even from his brother, we find him in the Soplica household, traversing Lithuania as a secret patriotic emissary from the legions. Here, then, we have the materials for a sort of Border foray. The quarrel breaks out between Soplica and the Count. Not that the latter would have cared much about it had he not been egged on by Gerwazy, the devoted steward of the Horeszkos. Gerwazy is one of the characteristic types that throng the pages of *Thaddeus*. Never forgetting and never forgiving the deed of treachery that slew his dear master, his one object in life since that day has been to go about killing and maiming as many of the Soplicas as he can come across. The faithful old servant still clings to the ghosts of his ancient duties, and each day he repairs to the ruined castle with his bunch of keys at his girdle to wind two wheezy broken clocks, of which the machinery will no longer work. Instigated by this old retainer, a figure half-pathetic, half-humorous, the Count comes to blows with Soplica. He raises an armed band and leads it against the Judge's house. This mode of proceeding, called a *zajazd*, was not uncommon in Lithuania. There were no police. The great families kept their own little armies of retainers. The man

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who wished for his lawful rights to be carried into execution betook himself to the nobles, who mustered together their armed friends and retainers, and, with a legal personage carrying the decree in his hand, took it upon themselves to see that the pleader had his due. In time, this system of the *zajazd* became a fruitful source of anarchy and of bloodshed. In *Thaddeus*, while the Horeszkos are at the throats of the Soplicas, and there is a general fight going on, the Russians in their turn fall upon both. Characteristically, the Poles forget their differences with each other, and unite as one man against their common enemy. All is patched up. Young Thaddeus is off across the frontier to join the legions, whither the Count betakes himself also to prove that though he has a foolish head the gallant heart of the Pole is in its right place. Everybody makes it up with everybody else, little Zosia, the granddaughter of the murdered Horeszko and the last daughter of her line, is married to Thaddeus, and their brilliant wedding ends the poem.

But, as M. Gabriel Sarrazin very pertinently observes, no bald outline of the plot of a poem like *Thaddeus* can convey any idea of what constitutes the real value of a singularly charming book.¹ Its brilliant national colouring, its superb descriptions of Nature, and the great historical background to which it is set, with its strong pulsing of patriotic hopes running through the whole, all conspire to make *Thaddeus* the masterpiece of literature that it

¹ Gabriel Sarrazin, *Les Grands Poètes Romantiques de la Pologne*.

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is. To the student of history, the lover of a nation's customs and traditions, this vivid picture of the life in Lithuania of a hundred years ago, described as Mickiewicz saw and shared it, is invaluable. We are transported into the pleasant wholesome country life of the Lithuanian landowner. In the home of Thaddeus's uncle, the Judge, where the story is chiefly played out, open house is kept, for hospitality was as pre-eminent a Polish virtue in those old days as it is still. On the evening that Thaddeus returns to his home he finds the place overflowing with guests. What matter that there are far more than the house can hold? The young men sleep very comfortably in the barn. With little love affairs thrown in here and there, not at all of a heart-breaking nature but just enough to add a slight zest to the order of the day, the men go a-hunting, ride and shoot, and lead a healthy happy out-of-door life. The uncle is an example of the good old-fashioned Pole, keeping up in his house all that was best in the time-honoured national customs, a kind master to his serfs, an upright and honourable man, devoted to his country. A delightful old-world ceremonial mingles with the freedom of the patriarchal household. At sundown, by the master's orders, all labour is at an end, for, says he, "the Lord of the world knows how long we must work. When the sun, His day labourer, departs from the sky, it is time for the husbandman to withdraw from the field." So, as the setting sun reddens the sky and darkness sinks over the wood, the sounds of the sickles cease, and we see a long procession returning from the forest and the cornfields and the

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meadows—the servants and the labourers, flocks of sheep, heifers with tinkling bells, horses galloping home, and the visitors themselves in high spirits, but walking in precedence in a sort of semi-stately procession that is one of the quaint old customs prescribed in the Judge's house. At dinner the Chamberlain, the guest of honour, always takes the chief place at table.¹ “To his age and his office that honour belonged. As he took it, he bowed to the ladies, the old men and youths.” Mickiewicz's careful repetition of this phrase at each meal that he describes in the poem is in itself a testimony to the punctilious ceremony that obtained in the manor-houses of Poland, that most courteous of nations.

Then what endless types are here! We have Jankiel, the Jew, who loves Poland, in his long cloak clasped with silver buckles, in his black silk belt, with his beard streaming to his waist. His marvellous playing of the *zimbala* at Thaddeus's wedding-feast is one of the finest passages in the poem. Or we are introduced to the monk, Robak, whose face is marked by scars of old wounds with which certainly the cloister has had nothing to do, and who, as he turns to the people saying *Dominus vobiscum* at his Mass, wheels about as though at the military word of command. The *Assesor* and the *Rejent*²—the titles and offices of all these people are endless, and bewildering to the English brain!—wrangle all through the book

¹ These curious old titles of the characters in *Thaddeus* were survivals of the days in free Poland when their owners held offices under the State.

² Legal appellations.

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on the knotty question as to which of their two dogs was the first to catch a hare. As these two gentlemen ride to the chase where the prowess of the canine rivals is to be decided by the company, both outwardly courteous as becomes two duellists on a point of honour, but eyeing each other the while with looks of deadly hatred, we are tempted to believe that a tinge of bitterness lingers behind the poet's smile, and that he points the moral, both here and in the whole episode of the *zajazd*, to the members of the Polish emigration. Or again the *Wojski*—another representative of a buried past that in Mickiewicz's verse lives once more—awakens the magic echoes in the forest to the music of his buffalo horn that none can play as he. He raises the huge twisted trumpet.

"He played. The horn, as a blast of wind, on its eddying breath carried music into the depths of the forest, and the echoes repeated the sound. The hunters were dumb, the prickers stood still, astounded by the power and the purity and strange harmony of those strains. The old man unfolded the art for which he was erst famed in the forests once more to the hunters' ears. He filled, he gave life to the woods and the oaks. 'Twas as though he let the dogs loose and started the chase, for there rang in his playing the whole tale of the chase. First a ringing glad call, the reveille. Then growls, and after growls, whining, the cries of the dogs. And here and there sharper notes as of thunder—the shots.

"Here he ceased, but the horn went on. All thought that the *Wojski* was playing still, but it was the echo that played.

"And again he blew. You would think that the horn changed shape and that 'twixt the *Wojski*'s lips it waxed and it waned, feigning cries of the beasts. Now long drawn as

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the voice of the wolf, it howled long and shrill. Again, it opened widely its throat and roared like a bear. Then the wind gave out the urus's cry.

"Here he ceased, but the horn went on. All thought that the *Wojski* was playing still, but it was the echo that played. Oaks repeated the sound to the oaks, and the beech to the beech.

"Again he blew, and it seemed as though in the horn a hundred other horns played. You heard the confused mingled cries of the chase, of anger, of fear, of the hunters, the dogs, and the quarry ; till the *Wojski* lifted the horn on high and the hymn of triumph smote on the skies.

"Here he ceased, but the horn went on. All thought that the *Wojski* was playing still, but it was the echo that played. All the trees in the forest were so many horns that carried the song to each other as from choirs unto choirs. And the music travelled ever wider, ever farther, ever softer, ever purer, ever perfect, till it died far, far, somewhere afar on the threshold of Heaven." (*Thaddeus*, Book IV.)

Against their natal setting of forest and marsh move these picturesque many-coloured groups ; in their long semi-Oriental loose coats, their gorgeous embroidered vests and belts, their high Wellington boots. Mickiewicz perpetuated in an immortal song types, traditions, customs that, swept away in the desolating flood that overwhelmed Lithuania, had for the most part been already blotted out from the face of the earth by the time that he wrote *Thaddeus*. Some years after its publication, Krasinski said of the poem :—

"The poet stood on the isthmus between that vanishing race of men and us. Before they died, he saw them, and already they are no more. He has eternalised that dead generation, it will not perish."¹

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewics.*

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Another Pole, reading *Thaddeus* after years of exile and isolation in England, wrote to its author :—

“I read it aloud and often had to break off the reading, so moved was I by that absolute transportation of body and soul into our native Polish plains.” He called it “a gravestone laid by a hand of genius on our ancient Poland.”¹ There is indeed a strong touch of finality in the poem. Dr. Kallenbach points out how the word *last* keeps recurring with its knell-like reminder that all the types of humanity and the customs old as the history of the nation were, even as the poet sung them, gathered to the dead. When every member of the household has sought slumber, “Slowly,” so Mickiewicz concludes the account of the evening, “slept the last *Woźny*² in Lithuania.” Or again : “So slept the last steward of the Horeszkos.” The Chamberlain, at the marriage-feast in the concluding canto, is the last who can lead the polonaise as it should be danced. And so on. The very sub-title of the epic conveys the same sense of farewell : *Thaddeus or the last Zajazd in Lithuania*.

Mickiewicz was a true son of the Polish race in his passion for the soil. He was the devout lover of *la terre qui meurt*. Natural history was always one of his favourite subjects, and each sod of earth, each tuft of grass, was instinct to him with beauty and with beloved life. Every aspect of the trees or plants, of the little lives of the woodpecker, the squirrel, of the wild woodland creatures among whom he had spent hours in his youth, the minutest details of the insect creation, are

¹ Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter of Stanislas Worcell, November 7th, 1838.

² A legal title.

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all delicately and tenderly recorded in the stanzas of *Thaddeus*. How closely Mickiewicz's eyes had noted what he afterwards sang may be gathered when we remember that he describes in *Thaddeus* what he had beheld only in long past years and never again. A Polish artist has pointed out that in Mickiewicz's word-pictures every shade of colour is perfectly rendered, that, for example, in his accounts of separate sunsets and sunrises they vary according to the season in which they take place, and each time with absolute fidelity to truth.¹ His descriptions of Nature, his paintings of the skies and woods and marshes, are the chief charm of *Thaddeus*, and are the finest in the Polish language. Indeed, Dr. Kallenbach does not hesitate to say that there are few like them in any language.² Clouds sweeping across the tempest-tossed, lurid heavens, the fires of sunrise and of the dying day, glow from his canvas. He gathers here with the magic touch of a great musician all the sounds to which he had listened and which he had loved when wandering in the forests—the trumpets of the winds of heaven, the sighing of the breezes in the trees, the voices of the birds and beasts. In his hands the Polish language, that most flexible and richest of tongues, becomes a superb musical instrument, ranging, at the poet's bidding, from deep organ harmonies through every shade of sound even to far-off ethereal and fairy echoes. So artistic, for example, is Mickiewicz's handling of the onomatopœia that is one of the chief beauties of his

¹ S. Witkiewicz. *Art and Criticism among us* (Polish): quoted by Dr. Kallenbach in his *Adam Mickiewicz*.

² J. Kallenbach, *op. cit.*

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mother-tongue that, to take one instance, the music of the forest which sighs through the poem is in the reader's ear as though he himself were walking in that Lithuanian forest.¹

"The great Polish forests," wrote one of Mickiewicz's fellow-countrymen in his criticism of *Thaddeus*, "give out an unceasing murmur, a roar like the waves of the sea, even on the calmest day. That constant murmur has a wonderful charm for the native. The hunter's ear distinguishes a sweet harmony in the whisper of those dark and unknown forests, and his heart understands each note of that magic music. In these forests the old traditions have taken shelter, the songs of the people, their persecuted faith and the history of great deeds. Mickiewicz listened to the undying melody of those traditions, songs and histories, and understood those sounds."²

"My native trees!" (sings Mickiewicz in Book IV. of *Thaddeus*.) "If Heaven grant that I shall return to gaze on you, my friends of old, shall I still find you? Are you living still? Ye, around whom I wandered once, a child.

"How much I owe you, oh, my native trees! I, a poor shot, escaping from the mockery of my friends for my missed

¹ It is largely on account of these onomatopœic peculiarities and its extremely delicate system of word-shading that Polish is such a singularly difficult language to render in any satisfactory way into English. In fact, descriptive passages like Mickiewicz's, or like that of the storm at sea in Sienkiewicz's short story, *The Lighthouse Keeper*, are practically impossible to translate with any degree of justice to the original. They are full of words and sounds for which we have no equivalent in the English vocabulary. The extracts that I give from Mickiewicz are nothing more than a rough shell which can convey no idea of the beauty of the original, to which I would beg the reader to betake himself.

² H. Szotarski, cited by L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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quarry, how often, in your stillness, I hunted dreams, when in the wild hunting-gounds I forgot the chase and sat me on a log. And around me the earth was silver with the hoary-bearded moss mingled with the deep blue of black and rotten berries. And further flamed heathery knolls decked with red berries like a rosary's coral beads. All stillness round me. Branches swung on high like green thick drooping clouds. Somewhere above their tranquil arch the gale raved, wailing, roaring, howling, crashing, thundering. Strange deafening uproar! It seemed that overhead was rocking a roaring sea.

“Below, it was as though the ruins of cities lay there. A fallen oak like a great hulk protruded from the earth. Upon it leant, like shattered walls and pillars, there branching logs, here beams half rotten, fenced round with a wall of grass. I tremble to look inside the barricade: there sit the lords of the forest, boars, bears, and wolves. At the entrance lie the half-gnawed bones of the unwary guest. Often a stag's two horns steal through the green grass like fountains twain. And yellow-girdled beasts flash through the trees, and like a falling star vanish deep in the wood.

“And again all is still below. Lightly the woodpecker taps on the fir, and flies far away. He is seen no more. He has hidden: but he ceases not to tap with his beak like a child when it hides, calling ‘I spy.’ Nearer at hand sits the squirrel, holding a nut, which she gnaws, in her little paw. Her tufted tail droops over her eyes like the plumes on a cuirassier’s helmet. Even behind this veil, she peers all round. She sees the intruder, and then, the woodland dancer, she leaps from tree to tree, twinkling, flashing past like lightning, till down an invisible cleft in the tree-trunk she runs, like a Dryad returning to her native tree. And again all is still.”

Each of these trees whispers to the poet’s ear of the legendary lore, the heroic tales, the wild traditions of Lithuania. The forests are peopled with spirits, ghosts, enchantments. He sings of strange barriers far beyond where the hunter has ever ventured; of

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haunted ponds whose depths no man has sounded, which vomit poisonous smoke and beneath whose waters sit evil spirits : of deformed, twisted, dwarfed, rotting trees, that stand as sentinels around them ; of a mysterious country beyond all the known bounds of the forest, where the animal creation live in harmony as in the fairy-tales, and whither they retire to die, so that the human wanderer in the forest never finds their bones.

Torn with longing for the sweet scenes he had lost for ever, "which of us," he cries after the first morning of his poem has risen over the Lithuanian meadows—

"which of us does not remember those years when, a young lad with his gun on his shoulder, he went out whistling to the fields, where no rampart, no enclosure, stayed his foot ; where even if he stepped across a ridge between two fields he would not know he was on a stranger's land. For in Lithuania, like a ship on the sea, the hunter roves where he will and by what way that he wills over the wide open fields. Like a prophet, he looks to the sky where there are signs in the clouds that the eye of the hunter can see, or, like a wizard, he talks to the earth which, dumb to the dwellers of cities, whispers with myriad voices into his ear.

"There the landrail screamed from the meadow. You sought him in vain, for he skimmed through the grass like the pike in the Niemen. Hidden as deeply, but in the sky, the morning bell of spring—the lark—rung overhead. Yonder the eagle on his broad wings beat through the wide firmament, terrifying the sparrows, as a comet frightens Tsars. But the hawk swings in the bright blue skies on quivering wing, like the butterfly pierced on a pin, till he sees in the meadow below a bird or a hare, and swoops down like a falling star from on high." (*Thaddeus*, Book II.)

Then the yearning of the exile and the weariness
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of a man worn out by the clash of strife and no doubt by the daily strain of living up to a great and arduous hope, can no longer be silenced :—

“Oh, when will the Lord God permit us to return from our wandering, and once more to dwell in our own homes on the soil of our fathers, and serve in the cavalry that wars only on hares, or in the infantry that carries its arms against birds ; to know no other accoutrements except sickles and scythes, or other newspapers besides household accounts !”

Poor Mickiewicz ! He died with this prayer unanswered on his lips, with the craving of his heart unsatisfied. He never again heard the murmurs of his native forests or wandered about the meadows of his childhood save in his dreams.

But how often as the day closed in the rattle of the gay noisy city that he always loathed, must his tired soul have pined for the sweet evening sounds, the cool pure forest air of a Lithuanian twilight.

“The sky seemed as though it drooped and drew ever nearer the earth till, both shrouded beneath a dim veil, like lovers they began secret talk, pleading their loves with faint sighs, with whispers and murmurs and half-uttered words, whence arose the enchanting music of night.

“The owl started it, hooting above the roof of the manor. Bats whispered on flimsy wings. . . . Nearer, moths, the bats’ little sisters, wreath in a swarm. . . . In the air, a great ring of insects assemble, twirling and playing as on a harmonica’s wheel. Zosia’s ear can distinguish in the thousands of hums the tune of the little flies and the false semi-tone of the gnats.

“In the field the evening concert had scarcely begun. Now the musicians began to tune up. Then the landrail screamed three times, the first violin of the meads. Then

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afar in the marshes the bitterns reply on the bass. Then the snipes as they rise and they wheel cry again and again like the beating of little drums.

"Finale to the murmurs of flies and the clamour of birds, the two ponds answer with double choirs, like the Caucasian mountain lakes that, enchanted, are silent by day and play in the night. One pond, transparent of wave and sandy of shore, gave out from its deep blue breast a low solemn sigh. The other pond with its muddy depths and its troubled voice replied with a cry of passion and grief. In both of the ponds sang numberless hordes of frogs, both choirs united in two great chords.¹ One sang *fortissimo*, but the other softly was warbling. One seemed to complain, but the other only to sigh. Thus over the fields did the two ponds converse with each other like two *Æolian harps* alternately playing."²

One of the best-known passages in *Thaddeus* is Mickiewicz's description of a storm. So famous is this episode that I feel it cannot be omitted in my sketch of the poet's career, although it is with regret that I present what is only a bald outline of a piece of magnificent word-painting. These verses, said to be one of the most splendid pictures of a storm ever written, are full of the peculiar and echoing music of the Polish language, which alone renders it the despair of the translator.

"Those morning clouds, scattered at first like dark birds, flying to the highest point of the skies, now gathered ever closer together. Scarce had the sun fled from the south when already the flock overspread half the heavens with a mighty cloud. The wind drove it ever swifter, the cloud ever darkened and drooped ever lower, till, half torn on one side

¹ Mickiewicz said that the frogs in Poland make a peculiar music of their own, such as he had heard in no other country.

² *Thaddeus*, Book VIII.

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from the skies, it bent to the earth and, like a great sail, it spread its wings wide. Taking all the winds to its bosom, from the south to the west, it flew through the sky.

“And there was a moment’s calm. And the air was heavy and silent as though it were dumb for terror. And the stretches of corn that had before bowed to the earth, and again shaking their golden ears to the sky rocked like waves of the sea, now motionless stand and, with bristling hair, gaze to the sky. And the green willows and poplars on the waysides that first, like women weeping at a grave, had prostrated themselves, wringing long hands, their silver tresses loose to the winds, now, as though dead, stand with looks of dumb grief in the likeness of the statues of the Sibylline Niobe. Only one trembling aspen quivers grey leaves.

“The cattle, wont to return slowly home, now crowding together, wait not for the herdsman, and forsaking their pastures flee to the house. The bull tears the earth with his hoof and ploughs with his horn, and affrights the whole herd with his ill-omened bellow. The cow lifts great eyes to the sky, opens her lips wide from wonder and gives forth deep sighs. And the hog dawdles behind, peevish and grunting, and steals wisps of corn which he keeps for his stores. The birds hide in the woods, under the roof, in the thick of the grass. Only the crows, in flocks surrounding the ponds, stalk with dignified step, turning black eyes to black clouds, thrusting out tongues from dry, wide-opened throats, and spread out their wings while they wait for a bath. But at last even they, foreseeing too great a storm, sweep off to the forest like the black gathering cloud. The last of the birds, the saucy swallow of undaunted wing, as an arrow pierces the black cloud, then sinks to the earth like a bullet of lead.

“To the west the still golden earth shines lurid, yellow-crimson. Then the cloud, throwing out shadows in the shape of a net, catches all the light that remains, and flies after the sun as if it were fain to catch him before he had set. Ever and anon blasts of wind whistle past, racing one after

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the other, flinging down drops of rain, great, shining, and round like a shower of hail.

“On a sudden the blasts grappled together, tore the skirts of each other, struggled with each other, rolled round, in whistling wheels rushed on the ponds, troubled the ponds to their depths, fell on the meadows, whistled through the osiers and grasses. Branches burst from the osiers, tufts of grass fly to the winds like hair torn out in handfuls, mingled with ringlets of corn. The winds howl, smite on the fallow fields, roll, root up, tear up clods of earth and open the way to a third hurricane that was wrenched from the fields like a column of black mould. Rising, it wheels like a pyramid moving, sends up showers of sand to the stars; ever heaving more broadly it opens wide arms to the stars, and with its trumpet of might it trumpets out storms, until with this chaos of water, dust, straw, leaves, branches, torn turf, the hurricane smote on the wood, and like bears roared through the wild depths of the forest.

“And now rain splashes unceasing as from a sieve in thick drops. Then thunder roared and with it down flowed the rain, now in straight strings binding with one long plait the earth to the skies, then as from buckets it burst forth in whole streams. Both the sky and the earth are now hidden entirely. Night shrouds them with a storm that is blacker than night. The horizon is riven from its end to its end, and the face of the storm angel shines out like an infinite sun, then shrouded again escapes into Heaven, and with a roll of thunder clashes to the doors of the clouds. Then the storm waxes greater and there is a mighty tempest of rain and a great thick darkness you might almost touch with your hand. Then the rain murmurs more softly, the thunder sleeps for a moment. Then it wakes and it roars, and again there is splashing of water, till all is still. Only the trees about the house murmur, and the rain whispers.” (Book X.)

But a sterner sound than that of Nature or of the gentle stir of the Judge’s manor-house runs through

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the pages of *Thaddeus*. Athwart the banqueting and the chase and the love-making, news at times steals in, brought by secret agents, of the coming of Napoleon at the head of the Polish legions when the winter is over—Napoleon, the object of Mickiewicz's adoration from childhood upwards, and of whom he thus sings in the first book of his great epic :—¹

“Such were the play and quarrels in those years in the quiet Lithuanian countryside, when the rest of the world was drowned in tears and blood: when that man, that god of war, girt with a cloud of regiments, armed with a thousand cannons, having yoked to his car of triumph the gold with the silver eagles, flew from the Libyan plains to the sky-reaching Alps, hurling thunderbolt after thunderbolt, in the Pyramids, in Thabor, Marengo, Ulm, Austerlitz. Before him and after him ran victory and conquest. The glory of such deeds, pregnant with the names of heroes, from the Nile went roaring to the north.” (*Thaddeus*, Book I.)

The poem culminates in the year of 1812, that joyous spring which Poland believed would end the sorrows of her bondage. Wedding music and the stirring call of the trumpet ring through the closing scenes. Thaddeus is home from the wars to wed his bride and to be off again to the Russian campaign. With him are the famous soldiers of the legions. The hero of the feast is Dombrowski, that gallant leader of a doomed hope, he who led the Poles so often to victory, and who lived to see the nation and the cause for which his soldiers had given their lives, betrayed. But all is joy and radiant expectation in the two closing cantos, entitled respectively, “The

¹ Mickiewicz never forgot the deep impression made upon him by having witnessed as a boy the personal love with which the French soldiers of the defeated Grand Army regarded their leader.

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year 1812" and "Let us love one another" (the old Polish toast). For Napoleon is in Poland and the nation's deliverance is at hand. The glory of a glowing spring shines over these last festal scenes in Lithuania, this last national rejoicing. At the brilliant bridal banquet, the gorgeous Polish costumes mingle with the uniforms of the legions. Thaddeus has wedded Zosia, thus blotting out the memory of the one disgraceful page in the annals of his house. The Count sits in his Lancer trappings, a pleasant guest beneath the roof against which he had borne arms. Even the *Assesor* and the *Rejent* have finally made peace over the question of the hare. The feast is carried out for the last time with all the good old Polish traditions. There are the national dishes, There is the ancient dinner - service of wondrous make, the heirloom of the house, all adorned with sweets and ornaments curiously fashioned, representing the history of Poland, and which changes colour by some mechanical device at the different stages of the banquet. There is the competing in sword-play of the officers. But the feature of the festivity, and one that gives full scope to Mickiewicz's mastery over sound and language, is Jankiel's performance on the *zimbala*. At first he will not play before that distinguished company. Then the little bride coaxes him into it, reminding him that he has always promised to play for her wedding. Two of his pupils kneel, tuning the instrument, while the master sits with eyes half closed, awaiting inspiration.

"He dropped the sticks on the strings. First he beat out a tune of triumph. Then louder he swept on the strings like

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a tempest of rain. All marvelled. But it was only to test them, for soon he broke off, and he lifted the sticks on high.

“He played. Now the sticks trembled with a motion as light as though a fly’s wing quivered over a string, giving forth a humming scarce heard. He lifted his hands, together they fell, and he smote with both sticks.

“All at once the tune burst from all sides as though a Janissaries’ band played on the bells, on triangles, on drums : the *Polonaise of the Third of May* rings out ! The gay notes breathe joy, make the ear drunk with joy. The maidens are fain to dance, the young men spring from their seats. But the thoughts of the old men are borne on that tune to the past, to those happy years when senate and deputies on the third of May in the council-hall fêted the King, reconciled with the nation ; when there was sung at the dance, *Vivat our well-beloved King ! Vivat the Diet, vivat the nation, vivat all the states of the nation !*¹

“The master ever hurries the time and strains at the strings. Then he struck a false chord like the hiss of a snake, like a knife grinding on glass. All shudder, and their mirth is darkened with a foreboding of ill. The audience feared that the instrument had dropped out of tune, or the musician had made a mistake. Such a master errs not ! He purposely plucks at that treacherous note, he confuses the tune, tearing ever loud and more loud at the sullen conspirator chord that destroys the sweet sounds of the strings till the steward understood. He covered his face with his hands and cried : ‘I know, oh, I know that voice. It is *Targowica !*² Then it burst with a crash, that string of ill omen.

“The musician runs to the treble. He draws out a tune. The tune is confused. He casts off the treble, and runs with his sticks to the bass. Hear thousands of clamours ever

¹ The constitution that should have saved Poland was granted on May 3rd, 1791, in the reign of Stanislas Poniatowski.

² The conspiracy of Targowica, by which a handful of Polish traitors undertook to betray the Republic to the partitioning powers.

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louder, the sound of a march, and of battle, of attack, of the storming, and of shots, the wailing of children and weeping of mothers. In such wise did the perfect master give out the horror of a town's storming that the peasant women trembled, recalling with tears of grief the slaughter of Praga, which they knew from song and from story. They rejoiced when at last the master thundered on all the strings, then silenced their sounds as though they sank to the earth.

"Then other music. At first, light and low humming. A few slender strings sigh like so many flies when they tear themselves out of the web of a spider. Then he plays ever more of the strings. The sounds that were scattered unite and entwine in the songs of the legions, and make up the mournful tune of the famous song : *Of the soldier and exile who goes through the forests and woods dying of hunger and want, till he sinks at the feet of his faithful horse, and the horse with his hoof diggeth his grave for him.*¹ The old song so dear to the Polish army ! The soldiers knew it. They listen and they remember that terrible time when they sang that song on their country's grave and then went forth to the ends of the world. Their thoughts carry them through the long years of their wandering, over land, over sea, in cold, in hot sands, among foreign nations, where often in camp that national song cheered yet made mournful their hearts.

"The master changes the tune. He soundeth another strain, he measureth the strings with his eye, and, joining his hands, he smote with both hands and both sticks. That

¹ Folk-songs had always a particular charm for Mickiewicz, and that of the soldier which he weaves into the text of *Thaddeus* was one of his special favourites. His daughter tells how she remembers, when she was a little child, hearing her father and Bohdan Zaleski talking together on the subject of national song. To illustrate something he was saying, Mickiewicz hummed the tune of this song of the dying soldier, and his little daughter, as she heard it, burst into tears. "See what is the power of these folk-songs," said Adam, turning to Zaleski, "when they move even a child so much." (Mme. Gorecka, *Recollections of Adam Mickiewicz.*)

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blow was so full of art, that blow was so full of power, that the strings rang out like trumpets of brass, and like trumpets blew to the skies the famous song, the triumphal march : ‘*Poland bath not perished. Dombrowski, march to Poland.*’ And all applauded and all cried out in chorus, ‘March, oh, Dombrowski !’ The player, as though astounded himself at his song, let the sticks fall from his fingers, and lifted his hands on high. On his cheek was a wonderful flush, his face, inspired, flamed with the fire of youth. Then, when the old man turned his eyes to Dombrowski, he covered his face with his hands, and from under his hands a stream of tears flowed. ‘General,’ said he, ‘long hath our Lithuania awaited thee, long as we Jews await our Messiah. Of old, singers have foretold thee among the people, Heaven hath announced thee with marvel. Live thou and combat, oh, thou who art ours !’”

Now it is time to dance the national polonaise in all its intricate figures. The bride is led out by the Chamberlain. His red jack-boots twinkle over the grass, the sword that hangs by his side and his splendid embroidered belt flash forth as he begins a stately step. Each turn and posture of the dance are supposed to tell a story. Now he stands still, apparently asking the lady. Now he leans his head down to her as if whispering sweet nothings into her ear. The lady, on her side, flouts him. Then off he sweeps his plumed hat, bowing low, and his steps waxing slower. She smiles assent, and the dance quickens. To the play of the hat with its heron feathers, he sweeps her away. All the other dancers, the jealous rivals, pursue. The figure now feigns his escape with his prize from the crowd. He stands with a hand gracefully uplifted, waving a command to the other dancers to pass by. Or he changes the

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dance by a dexterous turn to the side to shake off the pursuers, to elude them : they follow with fleet steps and wheel all around the pair in intricate rhythmic coils. He lays his hand on his sword, and faces round on them with a mimic wrath and defiance. Then the clouds of dancers wreath back in all directions, and forming up again in different lines are in full pursuit once more.

"Cries resound on all sides: 'Ah, he may be the last. Look, look, ye young men. Perhaps he is the last who can thus lead the polonaise.' And pairs followed pairs, clamorous and gay. They unwind; then they turn again in a ring like a great snake twirling in thousands of folds. The many-hued colours of the robes of the ladies and soldiers and lords change like the flashing scales of a fish, gilded with the setting sun's rays, and reflected on the grass's dark cushion. The dance whirls on fast and furious, the music re-echoes, re-echo plaudits and toasts."

The sun goes down on the gay scene ; but for long the night resounds with festivity, with the *Vivats* to the newly-wedded pair, to Napoleon, to the leaders of the legions.

"And I," so Mickiewicz ends the poem, "was with the guests, I drank the wine and mead, and what I saw and heard I have gathered in this book."

As we read, the glory of great hopes is about us. We forget that Dombrowski and the bands of ardent youths beneath his banners are going forth to disaster and defeat. We do not realise that this brilliant national feast is a farewell to joy, and that but a few years will have run before Lithuania is turned into

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a scene of desolation and of mourning. Yet these things had already befallen when Mickiewicz wrote the poem: and we can only marvel at the genius of the poet who, writing after and in the midst of bitter disillusion, can so completely summon back what was not only past for ever but what had gone down in a sea of sorrow.

Thaddeus—the echo of his lost youth—seems always to have been Mickiewicz's favourite among his poems. His daughter, in the recollections of her girlhood, says that it was the only one of his own works of which she ever heard her father speak. His dream was—so he tells us in the introductory lines to which I have alluded above—that this song of manners should reach the homesteads of the peasants of his native land: that the spinning girls should sing its verses over the wheel: that it should find a place on their lips and in their hearts with the people's folk-tales. This garland of rustic flowers, he said, would be dearer to him than any wreath of laurels. His wish has been granted: for wherever the Polish tongue is spoken, there *Thaddeus* is a household word.

Let us not read *Thaddeus* merely as a great work of art and a masterpiece of richly-painted local and national atmosphere. What it signifies to the Pole of to-day, oppressed, down-trodden, denied his sacred birthright, were best told in the words of one of the chief living biographers of Mickiewicz.

“It is true,” writes Dr. Kallenbach, “that not a hundred years separates us from the people of *Thaddeus*, but what a hundred years are those! The yoke, under which they still struggled, has now

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fastened itself on our shoulders and bowed down our heads. The enemy has utterly destroyed all those fragments that then still existed of the Polish national costume, and for half a century has bidden us breathe the air of captivity. It is not strange that in that air our cheeks have grown paler than those of our fathers, and that a smile is ever a rarer guest on our lips. Born in bondage, fettered in our swaddling-bands, we have not known even one such spring as our poet knew in 1812. And therefore the men of *Thaddeus* seem to us as the 'giant men' of fables, of a golden happy age."¹

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

CHAPTER VII

STRUGGLE (1834-1840)

"Empty mourning availeth nought. Our part is to commend our grief to Heaven and, ever constant to ourselves, to go forward—and shine."

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THE ink with which he had written *Thaddeus* was scarcely dry on his pen when Mickiewicz wrote to Odyniec :—

"I am convinced that we have lived and worked too much for the world alone, for empty praise and petty aims. I do not think that I shall ever again use my pen for trifles. The only work worth anything is that from which a man can make himself better and learn wisdom. I might even have left off *Thaddeus*, but it was already near the end. I want to make *The Ancestors* the one work of mine worth reading, if God lets me finish it."¹

He never did finish it. With *Thaddeus* his poetical life closes.

Soon after the appearance of the last poem that he gave the world, Mickiewicz, in July, 1834, married Celina Szymanowska, the little girl friend of his Petersburg days. He was lonely, overburdened and sad. Earlier in the year, he had written to Odyniec that working at *Thaddeus* had been his only distraction, but that as he kept his own sorrows locked in his

¹ Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to Edward Odyniec, February, 1834.

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heart, none knew how heavily life weighed on him. He then determined to marry. Both Celina's parents were dead. She as well as Mickiewicz had known disappointment. He was alone, so was she. Her bright temperament, her courage under difficulties, attracted him. They married: in somewhat prosaic fashion on the bridegroom's side. As far as he was concerned, it was no love match, though Celina seems to have been devoted to him: Maryla and Eva had been the only two women whom he had really loved. Yet a few weeks after the wedding he writes, if not quite with the rapture of a newly-wedded lover, that he felt happier and more light-hearted than he had done for a long while, and that the young wife was as gay as a child, flitting about their mansion of three rooms, smiling from morning till night. The poor girl had need of all her cheerful disposition and the brave heart that never left her in the midst of the rude trials that were to beset her married life. The struggle with penury, that was to be their almost continuous history, set in at once. Neither of them had any means. They lived as best they might from day to day; both of them, but especially Adam, with a calm and undisturbed faith in Providence, that concerned itself little for the future.

How earnest his mental outlook had become is illustrated by some words of his in that letter to Odyniec which I quoted in the beginning of this chapter:—

“Till now I used to think that you hovered about on the banks of life, you never grappled with anything seriously or plunged deeply into them. Now you are beginning to live in earnest. As you have never been

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very bad, you will find it easier to become very good. And, believe me, that that is the foundation of happiness, and except one's own faults there is no other real unhappiness. Depend on nobody, only on yourself. Care little about the world or men.”¹

At the time of his marriage, Mickiewicz's whole heart and soul were turned to religion. In religion, he had found not merely the only support for his own life, but that for his nation as well. He was one who was never content with burying the torch in his soul. For all his deep spiritual and intellectual humility, his was the fervour of the apostle. We may think of him as a man consumed with hunger and thirst after righteousness and with an unquenchable burning desire to see the sons of his nation walking in the light that would save them and their beloved country. These two passions were the master motives of his life. Poland now looked upon him as her greatest moral teacher, her spiritual guide, the Moses who would lead her to her promised land. “Adam,” “Our Adam,” “Our glorious Adam”; so is he fondly termed in the Polish correspondence of that day. It was his influence that brought many of his brother-exiles back to God, and that caused a spiritual rebirth in the ranks of the emigration. His life in these years in Paris was, according to Bohdan Zaleski, himself the devoutest of mankind, one of prayer and of religious and patriotic exaltation. Nor was he in the least a dreamer with his head in the clouds. His advice to his brother-Poles was of a soundly

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Edward Odyniec, February, 1834.

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practical nature. He exacted from himself and from each of them daily endeavours on the making and bettering of their souls. His chief hopes lay in the individual's "constant and little" sacrifices : these must precede and bring about the glorious hour of Poland's resurrection.¹ We see how Mickiewicz's spiritual and patriotic aspirations were ever inseparably entwined.

Then he banded with himself a little group of Poles with ideals like his own, and founded a species of confraternity which he called the Society of United Brothers. Its members bound themselves to lead a more deeply moral and religious life in stricter accordance with the teaching of Christ, and by their example to awaken their countrymen to the same desire. The act of dedication runs :—

"To the honour and glory of the Most Holy Trinity, for the salvation of our souls, the preservation and liberty of our unhappy country that, free and independent, she may openly serve the Lord."

Then follows a string of texts—Mickiewicz had a strong Scriptural bent in his character :—

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." "That you love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends." "Where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them," and so on.

Among the seven who enrolled themselves in this association were Bohdan Zaleski and his cousin, Joseph, who shared his wanderings ; Stefan Witwicki ; Cæsar Plater, who had fought as a very gallant boy

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*
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through the Rising and who had since devoted his life and means to his brother exiles,¹ and the old Philomathian, Domeyko. The chosen band met every Friday. They heard Mass together, and then went to Adam's rooms, where they read the Scriptures in company and talked of Poland's redemption. Looked up to as the leader of souls, Mickiewicz shrank from being recognised as such. He was of too simple a nature to brook adulation of any sort. Youth adored him ; but he gently put aside the expression of their admiration. And when friends wrote to him, addressing him as their master and teacher, he took exception to these terms, reminding them that he who stood to-day might fall to-morrow, and that man, unless he laboured incessantly for inward perfection, was useless.

"As regards others, only have always for every one a robe of mercy with which to clothe their nakedness. Weave that garment for me too, I want nothing more from you."²

But Mickiewicz did not satisfy himself with setting on foot this little confraternity. To him fell the lot—a very rare one for the Catholic layman—of founding, or being instrumental in founding, a religious order. As he watched the difficulties of the emigra-

¹ He was the cousin of the girl patriot, Emilia Plater, and fought by her side. When the Lithuanian army passed over the Prussian frontier, young Plater would not give up his hope of continuing to fight for his nation, and he struggled on foot to the Kingdom of Poland. He reached Warsaw in rags and half dead with the hardships he had undergone on the way : but he was in time to take part in the war till it ended.

² *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Hieronim Kajsiiewicz and Leonard Rettel, December 16th, 1833.

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tion, he became more and more convinced that the bringing about of a higher spiritual life among them would be best ensured by the rise of a religious congregation, as exclusively Polish as possible, and whose object should be to work for the moral wants of the Polish nation.

Among Mickiewicz's many friends and devoted admirers were two young Poles, Hieronim Kajsiewicz and Peter Semenenko. The former had fought in the Rising, and carried a scar for life across his forehead and eye. Both, plunged into the whirlpool of Paris, had lost all religious faith. Adam's influence changed the heart of Kajsiewicz ; and Semenenko followed his example. In the course of time they went to Rome to study for the priesthood, in spite of the efforts made against them by the Russian Government, which apparently scented some sort of danger in these two obscure young men.¹ It ended in the foundation of the congregation of the Resurrection, whose headquarters are still in Rome.² Mickiewicz, on his part, busied himself with starting a house of the new Order in Paris. His time and heart were given to this work ; he collected alms for it wherever he could find a donor. How embittered his relations with these spiritual comrades subsequently became lay hidden in the future.

¹ Count St. Tarnowski, *Our History in the Nineteenth Century*.

² English visitors to Rome may remember the present house of the Order, standing behind its iron gates, beneath the Pincian, off the Piazza di Spagna. Besides its educational establishments in Austrian Poland and its mission work on behalf of the Slavs of Southern Europe, the members of the Congregation carry on extensive labours among the thousands of Polish emigrants in America. Any Resurrectionist who should show his face in Russian Poland would at once be sent to Siberia.

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He filled his leisure by the perusal of the mystics in whom he delighted—Saint-Martin, Dionysius the Areopagite, Swedenborg, Jacob Boehme. His friends and acquaintances were not only among his fellow-exiles, who were linked to him by the common bond of misfortune and devotion to the same cause ; they included men and women in the brilliant world of Parisian art and letters. His countryman, Chopin, played in his house. He knew Victor Hugo and Chateaubriand. George Sand, David d'Angers, Montalembert, Lamennais,¹ Michelet and Quinet, and many others whose names are famous, were on terms of friendship with him. But grinding poverty soon withheld the Polish poet from mixing much in society. The wolf was at the door. In four months from the time that Mickiewicz and his wife set up housekeeping, their means were gone. Adam's works were rigorously banned in Poland. The financial difficulties of publishing his Polish writings in Paris were almost insuperable. He had no income ; and he was obliged to resort to journalism in French to support himself, Celina, and the little daughter who arrived after the first year of their marriage. Theirs became the dreary hackneyed tale of the successive stages of the fight for life against destitution. The servant is sent away, and the young wife, putting aside her music—she was a beautiful musician—does the housework. Then she sells her trinkets. Her

¹ Mickiewicz disapproved of Lamennais's attitude towards the Holy See, and their intimacy, for a while at all events, cooled ; but there is no doubt that each of them considerably influenced the other's mind. Mickiewicz once said that the only genuine tears he saw shed for Poland in Paris were those of Lamennais.

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letters to the sister in Russia, who had married Mickiewicz's old friend, Francis Malewski, give some idea not merely of the struggle of any poverty-stricken Polish exile of the thirties, but also of the hard circumstances to which Poland's greatest poet was reduced :—

"I play when I have time," she writes, "I have quite forgotten how to sing. I never visit anywhere, or even think of visiting. We have no settled income or money, and we never expect to have any. As for Adam's work, there is plenty of it, but how are we to dispose of it? We live as modestly as we can, but we must live, and, so far, we do not succeed. What will happen I do not know. Perhaps God will help us. In Him is all our hope."¹

"Do not think, dearest," she says in another letter, "that the want of money in which we are at present grieves us much. I have passed through greater troubles, and in another way I am amply compensated for it; I share with dearest Adam what he has."²

The hourly strain of solving the problem how to exist stifled Mickiewicz's inspiration. As so often happens to a great artist, the very fact that his daily bread depended on his writing clogged his pen. Then came dark times, when the husband and wife hardly knew how to struggle through even one day, and when the little family all fell sick through want and privation. On one occasion even Celina's brave heart failed her, and a friend of Mickiewicz's, coming

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*. This work of Adam's alluded to was a history of Poland that was never finished.

² *Op. cit.*

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in, found her weeping bitterly, and Mickiewicz himself in extreme dejection. Yet when their own troubles were overpowering, they took into their house a Polish friend, who was desolate and dying, and by their tender ministrations comforted his sorrows. He died, through Mickiewicz's influence, in tranquillity of soul, in peace with God and man.

"You cannot imagine what Adam is," writes another friend of the poet's. "I feel a love for him that is almost fanaticism. To me he is a being whom I approach with holy awe."¹

Through these sore straits, neither Mickiewicz nor Celina lost courage or a certain serene and unshaken trust in Providence. Mickiewicz, on principle, as we have already seen, would never disquiet himself for the morrow's troubles ; and when, in the heaviest pressure of his poverty, a friend asked him some question about his financial prospects, Adam quietly pointed to the birds and expressed his confidence in the God who watches over the sparrows. The simple tastes of both husband and wife came to their aid. When there was a slight improvement, and a few friends could drop in informally to visit them, Celina wrote to her sister that they were quite content and wanted nothing more.

It is pathetic in this sad period of Mickiewicz's life to read how the poet, when suffering from fever, yearned and sickened for but one hour of that fresh forest air of his native land that he felt would cure him. His prayer, he said, was that he might close his eyes in the country of his heart.

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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"I hear," wrote he to Francis Mickiewicz, "that you pine more and more for our country. Who can feel and share your feelings more than I, I who have grown old in the same misery, and God only knows for how much longer I shall have to bear it? But let us remember that there are others unhappier than we are, and yet their souls do not sink. We have already passed through the greater part of our lives, may God grant us to finish them. You are older than I am, both in years and misfortune. When I think what a sad youth you have dragged through, and that now you must spend the rest of your life yearned out in exile, I am cut to the heart, and I dare not lament over my own lot. Let us accept this penance from the hand of Providence, in the hope that things will become better either here or afterwards somewhere else. We have no right to be happier than all our nation."¹

As life went on, Mickiewicz became more and more a man straining to realise some superhuman ideal, the traveller striving for the "far impossible shore." He saw on a dim horizon a distant and a glorious poetic vision upon which he, in his humility, deemed that he might not gaze. He opened his heart on this matter to Kajsiwicz.

"It seems to me that historical poems and, generally speaking, all the old forms, are now half rotten, and it is only possible to revive them as a plaything to the reader. The true poetry of our epoch is perhaps not born yet, we can only see the symptoms of its coming. We have written too much for amuse-

¹ Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to Francis Mickiewicz (1837?).

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ment or for too small aims. Remember those words of Saint-Martin : ‘*On ne devait écrire de vers qu’après avoir fait un miracle.*’ I believe that such times are returning that one must be a saint in order to be a poet, that one must have inspiration and knowledge from on high about things of which the understanding knows not how to speak. These thoughts often awaken in me grief and well-nigh desperation. I often think that like Moses I see the promised land of poetry from the mountain, but I feel that I am not worthy to enter it. But I know where it lies ; and look, you young men ! to that side.”¹

Mickiewicz was always fond of quoting those words of Saint-Martin : ‘*Pour être un poète il faut être un saint.*’ Poetry that did not teach, that did not inspire men to better things, that was not written with a great purpose, was not poetry in his eyes. The brilliant, jealous young poet, Julius Słowacki, never forgave him for telling him frankly that he could not admire his work until he devoted his gifts to the cause of love and faith.

In 1838, a son was born to Mickiewicz. Then in the same year it seemed as though a harbour from the storm were opened to the struggling household. A hope was held out to the poet that the chair of Latin literature in the University of Lausanne would be given him. He went to Switzerland to make the necessary arrangements for what must have seemed to him as a rainbow promise after the deluge. Before the negotiations were concluded, the news reached

¹ Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to Hieronim Kajstewicz, October 31st, 1835. Mickiewicz evidently felt old already at the age of thirty-seven.

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him that his wife had gone mad and that his infant son was desperately ill. Mickiewicz hurried back to Paris. Despite all that his devotion could do, it was found necessary to remove Celina to an asylum. The babies were sent to the care of friends; and the unhappy husband, unable to endure the desolate empty home, took a little room near his children where he was alone with his misery. There he remained, shunning the face of every one who knew him, except Witwicki, Stefan Zan (brother of Thomas Zan) and one other friend; unable for the anguish of his mind to read, and what he did read he said he could not understand; writing nothing except those sad letters to his insane wife and to his tried friend, Domeyko, now a professor in the University of Chili. His only distractions were visiting his children and playing a game of chess with Stefan Zan.

The University of Lausanne accepted his application for the chair of Latin literature, but Mickiewicz could do nothing now either in that direction or in any other, not knowing how long his wife's illness would last. In the beginning of 1839, he told Domeyko that he had no hope of her cure, and that his soul had grown old for grief.

"There is misery everywhere," he writes. "I wonder that I have lasted through it all so far . . . I have suffered more than I can describe to you. . . . For many months I have seen nobody, and I seldom read even the papers, and I only visit the children, and I remain whole days in the house."¹

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Ignacy Domeyko, January 8th, 1839.

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Then in the same letter that wanders discursively from subject to subject, sure index of the writer's wearied mind, he speaks of the bad news from Poland and of the sorrows of the emigration ; how Bohdan Zaleski was in trouble, because the persecutions had fallen upon his relations in the Ukraine ; how another had died, whose death Mickiewicz had concealed from Domeyko, in order not to sadden his journey to America.

But his letters to his wife in her asylum are written in a different key. With his own heart breaking, he writes to the poor distracted mother cheering words of the hope he did not feel, and assures her of the health of the baby son who was in reality for a time at death's door. He begs her to try and divert her mind by music ; by doing some piece of embroidery for him which will be at the same time a memento of their separation. He thinks of little things to send her which will amuse her or calm her nerves. He praises some verses of her composition which she had sent him, and advises her to write some more. Or he tells her that he has been busy planning how, on her return, they can best arrange the working life of the house, so that she can be spared as much worry and care as possible and have more hours of repose.¹

In March, 1839, Celina returned home, more or less cured. "It is over," she wrote to her sister. "Let us think no more about it."² But the fear,

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letters to Celina Mickiewicz.*

² L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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too well founded as the sequel will show, of her relapse, throws a shadow henceforth over Mickiewicz's home. With that drawback, brighter days dawned for the family at last. The chair at Lausanne was conferred upon the poet; and in June, 1839, he removed his little household to Switzerland.

The sixteen months that succeeded in Lausanne were as a haven of rest—the last in Mickiewicz's life—between the storms that preceded them and those that were to follow. Mickiewicz quickly captured the love and admiration both of his colleagues and his pupils. The latter—whom the poet soon took to his heart in his turn—conceived such an enthusiasm for their professor that they treated him to a serenade on the evening following his first lecture. To be suddenly called upon to fill a professorial chair after a lapse of so many years during which his thoughts and endeavours had been turned in a totally different direction, was no easy task, and Adam began his lectures with considerable nervousness. In spite of the foreign accent that was noticeable in his French, and the mistakes in the language that he never seems to have spoken perfectly, the fire that was in him broke forth as he warmed to his theme, and those who heard him were at once devoted to him for life. “He saw everything from *en haut*,” was the criticism of one of his listeners.¹ His subject—Latin literature—may seem a somewhat far cry from the concerns of Poland. But wherever he might be, Mickiewicz could never forget his country. At his inaugural lecture, speaking of the martyrdom before its mother's

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz.*
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eyes of a Christian Roman child, he broke down and was unable to proceed. Recovering himself, he turned to his audience, who were following him with profound sympathy, and said, "Gentlemen, forgive my emotion. I have been a spectator of similar things."¹

During his life in Lausanne, Mickiewicz was necessarily isolated from his fellow-Poles. But there were exiles in the town from another unfortunate country. The Italian refugees gathered around the Polish poet. One of them—Mamiani—was wont in his dark hours to betake himself to Mickiewicz for strength and comfort, at Adam's words to possess his soul again. Mickiewicz felt keenly his separation from Polish surroundings, but in most other respects Lausanne remained in his memory as a little Paradise. Hardships were over. He had no more to struggle for dear life, with starvation for his wife and children staring him in the face. They lived in a house high above the lake. Outside their windows and the glass doors, opening on to the garden, stretched the snow-capped mountains and the blue waters of the lake of Geneva. The wall opposite the windows was one large sheet of looking-glass that reflected the loveliness of sky and water. At these windows, the poet would stand and watch the storms sweeping over the lake and the mountains, his wife frequently, at his request, playing the while on her piano. Apart from the hours that he spent preparing his lectures, over which he often sat for most of the night, much of his leisure time seems to have been given to his little daughter. He was a

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*
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devoted father. The ways, the health, the progress, of this child nearly always find mention in his letters to the far-distant Domeyko. During his quiet life in Lausanne, he and the little girl rambled about the country together, or else she would summon him from his writing-table to make the tour of the garden with her. Mickiewicz, always keenly interested himself in natural history, would stand for long watching the habits of the ant, and explaining these and other facts of insect life to the intelligence of the little girl. At other times, with unwearyed patience, he taught her her alphabet. Often, in the twilight when he and his wife were alone with the child, he made her sing Polish songs, while her mother accompanied them on the piano. Yet for all his petting there crops up what we may call an Edgeworthian strain of discipline in Mickiewicz's paternal dealings. His little daughter, elated by the proud possession of a pair of bronze shoes, gave herself such airs in consequence at a children's party that her aggrieved little playmates complained to her parents. Any touch of pride or love of show was a thing that Mickiewicz never could tolerate. Before all the children and in the presence of the luckless small sinner, he took the treasured shoes and gave them away to one of the little girls. To one at least of Mickiewicz's family—to this daughter whose published recollections of her father throw so charming and so intimate a light upon the poet's domestic life—Lausanne remained ever enshrined as a place where the sun always shone, the lake was always blue, and where, above all, she was the constant companion of the most affectionate of fathers

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who was never able to occupy himself so much with her again.¹

But Mickiewicz was one "whose sails were to the tempest given." Rest was not for him. He knew, as he wrote to Bohdan Zaleski from Lausanne, that short days of happiness were only his for a breathing space before they were shattered. He had not been long in Lausanne when the newly-founded chair of Slavonic literature at the Collège de France in Paris was offered to him. It seemed as if a wide field of work and influence for his country here presented itself. It was for that object that he lived, for if ever a man was ruled by a single-hearted purpose or laboured to fulfil one calling regardless of aught else, that man was Mickiewicz. He held that the only home for the Polish exile was where that exile could best work for Poland.² He therefore accepted the post, and the late autumn of 1840 saw the family, now increased by the advent of another daughter, once more in Paris. Dearly did this devoted son of Poland pay for his vocation. In going back to Paris, he went to tribulation that only ended with his life.

¹ M. Gorecka, *Recollections of Adam Mickiewicz*. This book deals only with Mickiewicz's domestic life. It was written for the poet's youngest son to give him some idea of the home he had lost as a baby, and of the father whom he could not remember. Addressed by one member of the family to another, simply as a sister talking to a brother, this tender and delightful little book has the effect upon the reader's mind as though he himself were an inmate of the poet's household, and had himself seen and known Mickiewicz.

² L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE SNARE (1840-1844)

“Grief leads me into a dark night.
I have entered the desert, the dark night.”¹

STANISLAS WYSPIANSKI.

MICKIEWICZ's first lecture at the Collège de France was due to be given in December, 1840. The course in front of him was fraught with no small difficulty. The short time he had for preparing it, the wideness of the subject, the well-nigh impossibility of procuring the books he required, presented perhaps even less of an ordeal than the exigencies of speaking on such a topic to an audience consisting on the one side of highly cultured French men and women, who yet were in total ignorance of Slavonic literature, and on the other of Poles of all classes, of all degrees of learning and education, many of them ready to make him the object of violent attack should anything he said not happen to suit their particular political views. The opening lecture had not been composed when darkness fell again upon the poet's home : Celina went out of her mind.

The first year of Mickiewicz's lectureship at the Collège de France may be thus roughly summarised. With intervals, his wife went mad again and again.

¹ Wyspianski puts these words into Mickiewicz's mouth at the moment in his drama, *The Legion* (from which I have taken them), when Mickiewicz is about to abjure his long adherence to the mystic, Towianski.

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Between her paroxysms, between his tending her in her sickness, the poet out of his distraught mind and heavy heart had to prepare as best he could the lectures on which the livelihood of his family depended. From the misery of his home, he went to face his exacting audience. In the early part of his course, his troubles had reached such a pitch that he knew not how to find strength to give his lectures. Each lecture he compared to a fought-out battle. Grief was now settling upon him, and on his worn face a smile was a guest seldom seen. To Bohdan Zaleski he wrote that he ever felt himself less capable of standing up against the burdens of his life or of driving away the sadness "that has slowly descended to the depths of my soul."¹ Yet, in the midst of his sorrows and harassing cares, he busied himself with the publication of Zaleski's poems and took the misfortunes of the Ukrainian poet to his heart as though they had been his own.²

These French lectures became Mickiewicz's chief mode of expression. Yet that his poetical inspiration was far from having died is evident. At a Polish banquet, given in his honour the Christmas after his return to Paris, he improvised. He spoke of the

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Bohdan Zaleski, December 25th, 1840.

² Mickiewicz was a great admirer of Zaleski's work, and it appears as though the thought of his friend's poetry was able to give him some pleasure and distraction even in those moments when he was himself most heavily burdened. In the letter of January 8th, 1839, to Domeyko, that I have quoted in the preceding chapter, and that was written when Mickiewicz was almost desperate, he can still tell Domeyko how Zaleski has arrived in Paris with a great packet of his poems that, in Mickiewicz's opinion, places him at the head of the Polish poets of his epoch.

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poet's vocation : he said that there is but one road by which the poet should walk, namely, the road of the heart that leads to God through love. His words poured forth with such inspired and fiery eloquence that his hearers seemed carried away into some higher world. Strangers embraced each other while Mickiewicz, his face transfigured, exhorted his audience to love of God and man : one spectator of the scene, ordinarily a cool-blooded, calm-thinking man, even said that had Mickiewicz commanded him to leap from a tower, he must have done so. No one there ever forgot what they had seen and heard. Mickiewicz, himself, said that he had never felt such inspiration since the night of Konrad's improvisation.

But there it ended ; and Adam's whole time was taken up with his home affairs and the lectures at the Collège de France. Among his audience sat the brilliant men and women of the literary and artistic Paris of the day. Michelet, Quinet, George Sand, Montalembert, Sainte - Beuve, listened to him. Tourgeniev and Chopin were there ; Poles of every description, from Adam Czartoryski whose cousin had been the last King of Poland, and who himself had formerly directed the foreign policy of Russia, from the generals of the war of 1830, to the artisan and nameless exile. Before this mixed and critical assembly the sad-faced poet, fresh from a scene of domestic misery, stood, his head with its waving grey hair thrown back, the notes at which he never looked, for his memory was unfailing, held carelessly in his hand, his dreamy eyes lighting up as he spoke with that sacred flame which never failed to carry away his

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listeners with a passion of admiration for the man. It is certain that his lectures, going over so vast a theme and on one, moreover, that was new to him, were full of philological errors and daring hypotheses.¹ At first they were more in the nature of improvisations than grave treatises. But, whatever their shortcomings, Mickiewicz's wide knowledge and his rapid grasp of a subject on which he had been able to spend so little time were admirable. The nobility of his thought, the originality and loftiness of his outlook, called forth universal applause.² As the course proceeded, Mickiewicz settled down as it were into the work, and by May and June the lectures had become masterly.³ Pole as he was, a victim himself of Russian persecution, speaking before crowds of Poles who were suffering under the same oppression, both he and they hearing each day of fresh outrages in their country, men noticed that, obliged by the nature of his subject to treat of Russian themes, he was never heard to speak one word of bitterness against the conquering nation, but treated her with strict and scholarly impartiality.

Between the storms we can still gain little rifts of peace, little tender glimpses of the poet with his children in his shadowed home. When the evening of his busy day arrived, his eldest little girl invariably ran to claim him for the hour that she called hers. Stroking her head or caressing her hair, Mickiewicz would talk to her, tell her stories or useful things, ask her what she had been reading. Even in explaining

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

² *Op. cit.*, and L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

³ J. Kallenbach, *op. cit.*

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away a child's little difficulties, his great intellect was apparent. In one word—as his daughter remembers—he could make the rough ways plain to her childish understanding. Then she set her heart on having a pet squirrel. Once, as Mickiewicz was going to his lecture at the Collège de France, he saw one for sale. Remembering his little daughter's ardent wish, and quite forgetting whether he was bound—he was very absent-minded—he bought it, and only realised when it was too late what he had done. He shut the creature up in his breast-pocket and went to his lecture. While he was speaking, the squirrel became tired of its prison and began to creep down his arm; so the poet was reduced to grasping as tight as might be his coat cuff with the other hand, expecting each moment to see his troublesome purchase run out, while he went on gravely delivering his lecture.¹

On the 29th of June, 1841, Mickiewicz gave the last lecture of the term. It was confused and bore the unmistakable signs of a mind strained beyond endurance. Celina's illness had broken forth again and was at its height; and during that terrible summer Mickiewicz, already worn out mentally and physically, went through weeks of nothing less than torture. With an unfailing tenderness, he devoted himself to the care of his wife in her raging madness. Stefan Zan and another ardent friend did what they could for him in his extremity. They never left his house, sleeping on the floor at night lest he should need their services. Then, so overwhelming were the straits through which Adam passed, that they dared not leave

¹ M. Gorecka, *Recollections of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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him lest he should be tempted to take his life. Those were days that blanched the poet's hair ; it turned white in three days' time. But his courage did not fail. Although the joy of his home, the one consolation for which he yearned in the turmoil and the stress of the Polish emigration was gone, as he believed, for ever, and the load of his sorrows was aggravated by the tidings that reached him of the redoubled persecutions in Poland, he still fought the losing battle of life. In this month of June he wrote to Bohdan Zaleski, telling him what he had heard from a Swedish friend who had just passed through Poland and Lithuania, and whose name he dares not, for the Swede's sake, reveal even in this private letter.

"Never yet has such a terrorism desolated our country. All the Poles of those provinces may be considered as 'mis hors la loi' ; such is the expression of that foreigner. Several of the doctors in Wilna are in chains because a suspected person hid in the hospital. The whole of the University buildings are changed into a prison. The penal colonies are depopulating the neighbourhoods of Wilna and Grodno.¹ As far as the Bug and Vistula everything that is Polish must be exterminated. Do not be surprised if you do not get letters from your part of the country, for you have no idea what the reign of terror is there, especially for suspected persons. Keep even all this information to yourself, because I promised to be silent till that foreigner has gone

¹ After the Rising, one of the measures of repression taken by the Russian Government was that of exiling the Poles into military penal colonies.

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back to his country, Sweden. He must still be in Odessa, and he is closely watched. Pray and write if you can," he concludes, "and love me as I love you."¹

At last, Mickiewicz was constrained to take the same sad journey that he had gone before : he went with his wife to place her in a madhouse. It was on July 30th, 1841, the fatal day of Mickiewicz's life. He returned to his empty home. His children had been sent away. Forbidding entrance to any one, even to his most intimate friends, he sat alone in his desolate room, a broken-hearted man, his hair white—not with age, for he was only forty-three—bowed down with sorrow and despair. Then occurred the strange dramatic moment of his history. A voice was heard at the door, insisting on admittance, declaring that the speaker had come from Poland with a mission to fulfil. Catching these words, and supposing that something of national importance was on foot, Mickiewicz roused himself and went to the door to bid the unknown visitor enter. He found a stranger, a grey-haired Lithuanian with gentle but penetrating deep blue eyes. He followed Adam into his room, and then began that disastrous interview between Mickiewicz and his evil genius, the man who ruined his life : the mystic, Andrew Towianski.

Towianski announced to Mickiewicz that he was the bearer of great tidings. He told the poet that he [Towianski] was the chosen Divine instrument to save Poland and the human race. At first Adam, dis-

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Bohdan Zaleski, June 23rd, 1841.

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tracted by his grief, could not listen. Then Towianski went on to declare that, as a proof of his Heaven-given mission, he would cure Celina. So solemn was his promise that Mickiewicz, struck to the heart by the tone and bearing of the man, was inclined to believe his words. They parted for the moment, Mickiewicz to pass a fearful night of spiritual indecision. He afterwards likened the anguish of those long hours of combat to Jacob's struggle with the angel. "At last," he said, "I trusted in the power of our Lord's mercy." His part was chosen. Against the wish of all the doctors, he went with Towianski to the asylum. In the presence of several witnesses, Towianski took Adam's wife by the hand and whispered something into her ear, inaudible to those present. Celina fell on her knees. The madness left her : and she returned home with her husband, cured, it is supposed by a species of magnetism, and a follower for life of the new prophet. "There are great and holy things"—so she wrote to her sister—"of which without the fear of God it is not permitted even to speak."¹

Such is the extraordinary history of Adam Mickiewicz's initiation into the network of a neurotic form of false mysticism, that wrecked his life and that blasted his magnificent genius in the prime of its power. Henceforth the soul of Mickiewicz is in slavery to this man whom he loved and worshipped and termed his "Master." His poetic inspiration was slain. He never wrote again. The best years of his manhood, his splendid spiritual and mental gifts, were devoted to the one aim of winning all mankind to enter those

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewics.*
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labyrinths in which he himself was lost, but which, with an impassioned and genuine conviction, he believed would bring about a better epoch of humanity and the salvation of his country. With a man of Mickiewicz's stamp acting as its chief apostle, Towianski's religion was soon established : and bands of the Polish exiles, Frenchmen, and Italians, after Adam's example, followed the new prophet as their beloved leader and their guide.

Around the personality of Towianski, discussion has raged. To his disciples, he was an angel of light, the messenger appointed from on high to lead the human race to new heights of spirituality. Those who resisted his teaching, and who witnessed with a passion of grief its effects upon Mickiewicz and on other members of the Polish emigration, frankly looked upon him as a mere charlatan or even as an emissary of the evil one. Others again did not hesitate to declare that he was a tool of the Russian Government, sent by the latter to spread fresh dissension and ruin among the Poles in Paris who, at that time, were still an important factor in Polish national life. There yet remains the theory that he was merely a well-meaning fanatic who had managed to deceive himself quite as thoroughly as others were deluded by him. One thing not even his greatest enemies have ever refused to own, namely, that his private life was irreproachable, even, in some respects saintly. Endowed with a captivating sweetness of manner and address, with a strong personal fascination that at once brought men to his feet, this visionary who won to himself Mickiewicz and many Poles of learning and

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talent, who all reverenced him as their master with the deepest devotion, was a man of no intellectual gifts whatever. Yet, for all his great intellect, Mickiewicz humbly owned that he felt like a schoolboy by the side of the new prophet : and others of Poland's poets, including Severyn Goszczynski and for a while Słowacki, were subjugated by his charm, and consecrated their talent to his cause.

There is no mystery about his early years. He came from Lithuania where he possessed estates. He laboured there for the welfare of the peasants till the moment came when he felt himself called to propagate his mystic theories through the rest of Europe. He started on his journey ; failed in his endeavour with two prominent Poles, the Archbishop of Posen who, discovering that he believed in the transmigration of souls, would have nothing more to do with him, and Skrzynecki, one of the commanders-in-chief of the Rising of 1830, who yielded for a time to his attractions and to what was lofty in his teaching, but quickly drew back. Towianski then came on to Paris, and approached Mickiewicz. Here an interesting detail comes in. Towianski with all Poland had read *The Ancestors*, and it is a known fact either that he played up to the part of the chosen man whom the poet foretold in the vision of the friar,¹ or, to put it in a different way, frankly regarded himself as that chosen man.² The fact that Towianski was at one time of his life blind like the heavenly vicegerent described by Mickiewicz may simply be a

¹ See Chapter IV.

² Towianski said openly that he considered himself to be this man.

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curious coincidence. But whether it is the case, as has been suggested, that Mickiewicz, with his strange sixth sense, uttered words in moments of exaltation that are impossible to account for by ordinary laws, or what the real clue to this mysterious passage may be, is a question that must be left as it stands.

In any case, Mickiewicz had been waiting for many years for the man of his hopes and dreams. Shortly before Towianski's appearance in Paris, Adam had seen a vision in broad daylight—in the "white day," to use the graphic Polish expression—of a messenger sweeping in a chariot from the north with tidings of great joy. At the Christmas banquet of the preceding year to which I have already referred, in a flood of inspiration he had improvised and said that all men were walking on evil roads which would lead to no sure goal "till, if God takes pity on us, He will send a man who will be for us *true life*"—the italics are Mickiewicz's—"whose words, deeds, and gestures will be as articles of faith."¹ Towianski found, then, all too ready a disciple in this mystic, who was at the moment stricken down with grief. He was overwhelmed with the calamity that had befallen his

¹ I quote from Mickiewicz's letter to General Skrzynecki, written to explain his adherence to Towianski, in which he describes this improvisation. How carried away the poet was in these moments of inspiration is illustrated by the fact that he tells his correspondent that the phrases I have given in the text were the substance of his poem, but that he could not remember the exact words (*Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to General Skrzynecki, March 23rd, 1842.*) Skrzynecki, who knew Towianski well, wrote in the strongest language to Mickiewicz, warning him against the mystic's teaching. Mickiewicz, under the influence of Towianski, attached a curious importance to gestures.

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home : Towianski promised to remove it. He was cut to the heart by his nation's sorrows : Towianski held out a like hope for them. He was weary of a world of injustice and of hatred, where his high ideals were trampled under foot : Towianski said that a better age was close at hand.

We now reach the difficult moment in which some idea must be given of that confused involved religious system that caught the soul of Adam Mickiewicz and held it in what turned out to be the most cruel of bondages. Towianski's religion, closely related to Gnosticism, seems to have been a jumble of extravagant mysticism, that in its practices frequently degenerated to mere puerility, interwoven with the ideals of the Gospels.

A rough idea of the doctrines of Towianism may then be stated as follows :—

The earth is given over to the keeping of clouds of good and evil spirits, influencing mankind. Many of these spirits are doing penance until they are reincarnated in this life, not necessarily in human forms. Till the advent of Christ, the globe of earth was completely held in possession by the powers of darkness. God took pity on the earth when Christ came and banished the rule of the evil spirits and lit light in the hearts of men. Fervently as Towianski inculcated the imitation of Christ—by prayer and deed, and by bringing into daily life the precepts taught by the Gospels—he did not fully believe in His Divinity. Christ's work was incomplete, and God's word, which lived in Him, died with His death. Since His death, the earth has again been subjugated by the ministers

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of the devil. About two thousand years after the foundation of Christianity chosen and inspired men will be sent on earth by God to develop the work begun by Christ. The number of these emissaries is to be seven, and the last of them will banish the infernal powers for ever, so that evil will be no more and the world will become Heaven. Towianski himself was to be the second of the band, but to him was given the grace of hastening the dominion of light in certain parts of the "globe of earth," and especially France, which had been made ready by the work of Napoleon for the reception of the truth. The spirits of darkness will pit all their strength against these messengers of Heaven, but the latter by dint of toil on their own souls will create columns of light in themselves against which hell shall be impotent. Upon each man's interior travail depends the shedding forth once more of the light. One just man who is under the dominion of the "columns of light"—one of the cant words of Towianism—can, by his moral strength alone, save a city and a nation from destruction. The spirit only is all-powerful. Reason, the intelligence, are not to enter into the spiritual life. Man's duties are three-fold : to raise his spirit, to conquer the body, to raise the body to the height of the spirit. How was this exaltation of the spirit to the contempt of the body to be wrought? Apparently not by waging the world-old war of asceticism—barring an occasional fast, we do not find much of that in Towianski's creed—but by keeping the soul in a continual state of exaltation, of ecstasy. The measure of each man's perfection was his capability of ecstasy, and as the redemption of the

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world, the arrival of the better age, was conditional on the individual's moral worth, this state of ecstasy, this "moving of the spirit," which word will ever be on the lips of Mickiewicz, becomes the chief spiritual exercise, the predominant and all-important obligation for the Towianist.¹ Upon it depended the salvation of Poland and the whole human race. What were its effects upon the minds and bodies of Towianski's followers we shall see later.

Then there comes in the extraordinary Napoleonic cult, that was one of the foundation-stones of Towianski's religion, and that was perhaps less inexplicable in the thirties of the nineteenth century, when a sort of Napoleon worship was not uncommon, than it is to us. Not only had all Poland once hailed Napoleon—and with every justification—as the man who would restore their nation, but the passionate and mystic devotion of the Poles to Napoleon followed him to his very end.² Zygmunt Krasinski—who unlike Mickiewicz and Słowacki never yielded to Towianski's doctrines—based the great historical theory that brought peace to his tortured soul in part upon the Napoleonic conquests; Mickiewicz and Towianski carried their canonisation of Napoleon to lengths so extravagant as to fall little short of insanity. According to them, Napoleon was the man sent on earth to fulfil the undone work of centuries, to lead

¹ M. Zdziechowski, *Mesyanists and Slavophiles*, which gives so lucid a summary of Towianski's doctrines that I have borrowed much of the above paragraph word for word from it. Cf. J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

² After Napoleon's exile to St. Helena, two Polish gentlemen begged permission to follow as members of his suite.

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the world from the dominion of the spirits of darkness to that of the columns of light, to make God's word born again in political relations. For the spiritual revival was not only to influence the inner life of each soul, it was to draw close the links between the Gospel and public life. The time had now come for the governments of the various countries to rule in a new spirit.¹ Napoleon, said Mickiewicz and Towianski, was the greatest man since Christ, and the man nearest Christ. Mickiewicz indeed uses the expression "the Christ - Napoleon tone";² *tone* being one of the chief Towianist catchwords to describe the state of the soul. Napoleon failed in his mission because he relied on material strength instead of trusting to the power of the spirit; in other words, he did not persevere in the "tone."³ He fell through pride, but his spirit, influencing mankind, will effect his calling still and lead France and the nations to God. His mantle had fallen on Towianski's disciples: it was their work to carry on his unwrought mission. One of their chief duties consequently became that of uniting themselves in spirit to Napoleon. The closer did this union take place the higher spirituality did the soul attain. He who did not join in spirit with Napoleon was incapable of fulfilling Christ's mission

¹ We have seen how Mickiewicz preached this doctrine in *The Books of the Polish Pilgrimage*. The mixture in Towianism of spirituality and politics is characteristic of the Polish thought of his time.

² "Our operations are religio-political: our tone is Christ-Napoleonic" (*Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz*. Letter to Severyn Goszczyński, July 28, 1843.)

³ M. Zdziechowski, *Mesyanists and Slavophiles*.

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on earth. That man who has even a spark of Napoleon's idea within himself is nearer to God than many who without it pray all day.¹ It became one of the approved spiritual undertakings of the Towianist to spend the night on the field of Waterloo, entering into communication with Napoleon's soul. Such a union was in itself a prayer.² Towianski himself professed to be in personal communication with Napoleon's spirit and to be under its guidance.

And side by side with these extravagances, these delusions, these hallucinations ; side by side with the theories that made Towianski refuse to repulse a muddy dog because he feared to wound through it the susceptibilities of the spirits of the other world on the same line as it might be ; the Master preached with all the charm of a most winning personality the great and noblest ideals of Christian charity. He did not hesitate to declare boldly to his countrymen, suffering though they were in their daily lives and in those dearest to them the bitterest wrong at the hands of the Russian Government, that only after they had trampled underfoot every vestige of hatred to the nation that was their deadliest oppressor, only after they had learnt to deal with her in the spirit of sublimest Christian love, could they look to see Poland freed. This he exacted as the condition of their country's resurrection. The Pole's passionate devotion to his native land was to be purified. Let the Pole raise his heart to such a state of purity and

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

² Zygmunt Wasilewski, *From the Romantics to Kasprowicz* (Polish). Lemberg, 1907.

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moral liberty that the love of his country shall flow from the love of God, "that the first movement of our souls, our first sigh, shall be for God, for the eternal native land in Heaven, and afterwards for the Christian native land on earth : so that we shall stand before God first as Christians, sons of the Kingdom, and afterwards as Poles, sons of a Christian native land."¹

Laying down rules how the Pole must pray, he says :—

"In our prayer let us awaken in ourselves above all the love of God, and in that love let us ask for the true Christian native land in which the heavenly native land lives and is propagated."

The Pole must raise himself to the heights of a Christian country where reign love, truth, justice ; and to the Pole who, on the contrary, abases himself, will never be given the country for which he longs.

"To raise oneself to that Christian height, waking in our hearts the love of our country proceeding from the love of God, and to ask God for such a country, is the real prayer for our country, the prayer which pierces the heavens and reaches to the throne of the Most High. . . . Praying thus for our country let us awaken in our souls submission to the Will of God, that most holy Will, which flows from the highest wisdom and boundless love and sacrifice for us, and which exacts submission from us only for our

¹ Taddeo Canonicus, *Andrzej Towianski* (Polish). Turin, 1897. Taddeo Canonicus, once head of the Italian senate, and who died in 1908, was an ardent Towianist. He wrote the life of Towianski, which was printed for private circulation only, and published in French, Italian, and Polish. The Polish version is the only one that I have been able to find.

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good, to lead us through darkness to redemption. . . . Let us therefore lay in God's hands even our purest desires for the restoration of our native land, and let us submit to God's Will the time of obtaining it. . . . Who does not know how burning and self-sacrificing is the Pole's love for his country? But to-day we must merit before Heaven and earth that testimony that our love of God's Will is higher than our love of our country.”¹

Then he begs his brother-Poles to look upon the sorrows of Poland only as a punishment for the sickness of their souls, which the heavenly Physician will remove when the disease is healed. In this wise they will overcome their instinctive hatred for the Russian persecutor, who is but the instrument of that cure.² Prayer, taught he, must be not merely the raising of the heart to God, but the consecration to God of the whole life and the perfect fulfilment for His sake of every duty.³ Towianski held, too, the great doctrine of Mesyanism, already preached by Mickiewicz and by the mystic Krasinski, that Poland was the moral leader of Christianity. The first condition of the spiritual life, said Towianski, must be brotherly love, renunciation of all personality and reasoning, and full

¹ Taddeo Canonicus, *Andrzej Towianski* (Polish). Turin, 1897.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.* *Andrea Towianski*, Rome, 1896, quoted by Father Smolikowski in the Italian translation of his *History of the Congregation of the Resurrection* printed for private circulation. As I could not see the Polish original of Father Smolikowski's history, the author very kindly sent me that portion of the Italian translation which bore on my work.

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faith in God.¹ To work in the spirit of love was the end that he continually inculcated : and yet Mickiewicz's old friends noticed how, under Towianski's influence, a strain of dogmatism and intolerance crept for the first time into his dealings with the souls of men : a seed of bitterness and hatred.

From what we know of Mickiewicz, we can understand how Towianski's mysticism appealed alike to his weakest and his strongest side. Dreams and visions already held a significant part in his life. The spirit world had always lured him. The ideals of charity and prayer that Towianski taught so eloquently had long been the daily bread of Adam's fervent soul. It appears certain that in his first ardour Mickiewicz did not perceive the full extent of Towianski's teaching. Nor, as has been pointed out, were Towianski's dealings with Adam characterised by straightforwardness.² When the two met, Mickiewicz was a devout Catholic. Towianski professed to be the same, and declared to the end of his life that he was so. Yet at the same time he held doctrines, such as the denial of eternal punishment, the transmigration of souls, a disbelief in the divinity of Christ, that are in direct opposition to Catholic belief. Perhaps the two following facts are the most significant of the prophet's underhand procedures. Before his first interview with Mickiewicz, Towianski—protesting all the while that he was within the pale of the Church—had not been to confession for twenty years. Knowing that this would at once arouse Mickie-

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² M. Zdziechowski, *Mesyanists and Slavophiles*.

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wicz's suspicions, he betook himself to confession only after he had seen for himself Adam's fidelity to the practices of his Church. In the second place, he kept it secret from Mickiewicz that he had written a summary of his doctrines in a book to which he had given the title of *The Banquet*. When Mickiewicz, hearing of this, made some inquiries of Towianski, the latter replied that he did not remember what he had written. Yet, later, when Mickiewicz was in full bondage, body and soul, to the writer, the latter insisted that the lectures at the Collège de France should be founded on the book.¹ There is indeed a strong element of shiftiness in Towianski's whole conduct. Mr. Zdziechowski points out how he gives us the idea of a teacher unconvinced by his own teaching. He was not true to his own message. There was in him none of the fire that consumed Mickiewicz's soul, none of the enthusiasm of a living faith that beats down barriers and removes mountains.² It seems as if only Towianski's personal charm and the beautiful side to his character that undeniably existed could have invested him with such power to draw men and women to his side. As time went on and events proved the falsity of his prophecies and theories, he was constrained to change his doctrines to satisfy the clamours of those who had followed him and found their expectations come to nought. Again and again, to give himself any sort of justification, he wavers, explains things away as best he can, retires from one untenable standpoint to take up another.³

¹ M. Zdziechowski, *Mesyanists and Slavophiles*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

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But these things were at first hidden from Adam's eyes. Towianski had apparently wrought a miracle in bringing back the lost joy of his home : how could he doubt the prophet's assurance that this manifested the truth of his message, and that the hour of Poland's deliverance had even now dawned ? The heavens opened to Adam's gaze : sorrow was no more. He was as one who, long watering the desert of his exile with his tears, now beheld the rainbow promised land before his feet. Believing that the days of their banishment were at an end, he summoned all his absent friends—even Domeyko from the New World—to Paris, to be ready for the journey to Poland.

"Bohdan!" so he writes in his first raptures to Zaleski, "as soon as you have read this letter, fall on your knees and thank the Lord. Great things are happening here. The emigration is united. Make haste and come to us at once, so that your heart may be comforted, may overflow with joy, may flower, may grow green. There are flowers in my home and spring in my heart and soul. For several days I have been writing to you in every direction, not knowing where you are. Summon Joseph immediately to Paris. More I may not write."

As a conclusion to the letter, he enclosed three ecstatic verses—the last real poem of his that we have—in which he bids his nightingale soar on high and take to itself the wings of a falcon and, bearing aloft the triumphant hymn of David, sing farewell to the tears that have been shed and to the dreams that have been fulfilled :—

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"For the word hath gone forth, and the burden of years hath given its fruit, and a miracle hath been wrought, and the world shall be filled with joy."¹

To the priest, Alexander Jełowicki, with whom his relations were shortly to become very different, he wrote, begging for his prayers, "that we may not sink beneath the weight of undeserved mercy."²

Somewhere about this date, a young Pole sent a poem of his to Mickiewicz, in which he tells him how he had gone down in an ocean of despair, but that words that Mickiewicz had spoken at his lectures had shed light once more over the darkness of his soul. Adam, whose generous dealing with young poets and with youth in general is one of the delightful features in his character, wrote back as follows: and this letter, written in the full fervour of his new-born hopes, is far more eloquent than is usual with him. He hated writing letters, and tossed them off in such a hurry and wrote so carelessly that the words are often half-formed.

"DEAREST BROTHER,—I watered your poetry with a brother's tears. Do not write about my genius or praise it. What are geniuses? Repentant sinners, who have lasted out, if not a *thousandfold life*, as you say, at least a *multifarious life*. And therefore so far I am only your *elder*. For a long time I have thought about you and wished to know you. Your former poetry was *thrown away*, you were not your-

¹ Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to Bohdan Zaleski, August 15, 1841.

² Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to Father Alexander Jełowicki, September 3, 1841.

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self. You were not intended to write descriptions and to imitate historical poems. In your *Lokiet* I caught only a score of lines and thoughts in which I saw your *spirit*. In the satires I was afraid that you were going the way of Persius and Juvenal. You strangely resembled them from the quality of your soul and your style. But that is past. In your last poem you have stood on the point whence the road leads. Stand fast in the Lord. Reckon with no one, imitate no one. Ask of the Lord, cleanse your heart and listen to your spirit. We are in great need of new poets. Great events are drawing near. Perhaps you have heard of them. That news is true. God is taking both us and our cause beneath His protection. You will shortly see the *signs* of this. Be comforted, brother, our misery is about to end. As your elder brother I advise you, and *officially* order you to take comfort. Comfort and strengthen your brothers, and because you yourself were once hard and faithless, do not be scandalised by their hardness and want of faith. Awaken in yourself love of our Lord and of your neighbour. Honour Christ. Call upon His Mother. May the Lord protect you.—Always your loving brother,

“ADAM MICKIEWICZ.”¹

Towianski soon organised the “Circle,” as his following always called itself, on a regular basis. He divided them into bands, consisting of seven persons, each presided over by a spiritual leader who, in urgent moments, met in their turn for consultation with each other. These little groups assembled constantly to

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*
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pray in common ; to listen to readings from the Bible, to Towianski's homilies, and, after the latter's expulsion from France, to his letters and to Mickiewicz's sermons ; and to labour at the task of raising their souls to ecstasy. Those who could not reach the state of ecstasy had to betake themselves to the help of those brothers whose spirits were strung higher. All alike were to work for the "realisation of God's word" on earth ; and so impossible was the measure of this realisation exacted by Towianski that it finally broke up the Circle. The perfection to which he bade them aim was one that would dispense with outward acts or dogma : and none of his followers ever reached that state of disembodied unearthliness that he enjoined. After three years of heavy toil, Mickiewicz sadly confessed that though the "brethren" had attained a high state of spirituality, not one could flatter himself that he had "realised the word" in deed or in his life. The tension at these meetings, the frenzied efforts after ecstasy, wrought their natural results. When at last after years had passed Mickiewicz emerged from his long and terrible spiritual ordeal, his face was indelibly branded by the signs of what he had passed through.

But at first all went smoothly. To those members of the emigration who followed in the footsteps of Towianski and Mickiewicz, light seemed to have arisen in the midst of the darkness that had overwhelmed them. The moment of Towianski's appearance among them was that of their greatest misery. By this time the friends and relations they had left in Poland were exiled, dead, or in Siberia. A new

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generation had sprung up in their country, to whom the Polish exiles in Paris were unknown or forgotten. One of Towianski's most ardent neophytes tells us how, stricken to the heart by the sadness around him, with all hope torn from his soul, he gave himself up to despair. He shut himself in his Parisian garret, filled with detestation for the empty, spiritually profitless journalism by which he earned his daily bread. Then, at Towianski's advent, the skies became bright once more, and he blessed the man who taught that human wisdom was folly, and who yearned for truth and goodness.¹

The earliest period of Towianski's mission was marked by the high pitch of soul in which the members of the Circle lived. Mickiewicz himself dwelt in a state of ecstasy. He shared all, even the last sou from his pocket, with the brethren. His young children, returning home after their long absence, found a strange oppressive atmosphere in the house of something which they could not understand. The old familiar figures ceased to come there, and strangers filled their place. Not only had a sense of disorder crept into the home, but the children soon discovered that the happy days in which they had been petted and made much of were gone.² They were put on one side. Their father thought no more about their bringing up or their education. To him nothing was of import save the "Cause," as Towianism was termed by its votaries. With the new epoch of the world's spiritual and political existence drawing

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² Mme. Gorecka, *Recollections of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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nigh ; with the redemption of Poland and the consequent deliverance of the exiles close at hand, Mickiewicz's one fear was lest these great events should find himself and his fellow-believers spiritually unprepared, their lamps untrimmed. It was his business therefore to labour at his soul and on those of others at fever-heat.

Matters began to take a public aspect. On the 27th of September, 1841, Mickiewicz summoned his countrymen to meet in Notre Dame for the object of hearing the grace that Towianski had come to proclaim, and to thank God for the same. This was Towianski's first public appearance. Turning to the little knot of men who surrounded him, Towianski told them that it had at last been granted him to fulfil his burning desire of proclaiming the mission that he had received from on high. The hour of God's pity had struck, and Heaven had sent him to announce that "the epoch of mercy" had begun that very day.

"I have come," he went on, "to announce to you that soon all our sufferings will cease, all the sufferings of the human race arising from violence and material strength will pass away. The Gospel will shine forth, not in words and forms, but in all hearts, and nations will be rejoiced by liberty. I come to summon you to participation in this great work, you who are the first of its first workers. Your sufferings, your labours and your self-sacrifice give you undisputed rights to this. This is even so, we shall soon see all this with our own eyes. . . . The work of the Lord has already begun."¹

¹ Stefan Witwicki, *Towianism Exposed* (Polish). Paris, 1844.
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After a discourse of some length upon this theme, he threw himself on his face, weeping, amidst the tears of those present. This scene was a prelude to other sermons and other meetings, all of the same vague nature. It has been said that every Pole is at heart a mystic. Hence the alluring side of Towianski's mysticism ; his high-sounding promises ; his summons of the emigration to spiritual labours that, besides paving the way to the liberation of their own beloved country, gave the aimless life of the exiles some motive for which to live and work—these things captivated the ears of men worn out by suffering, and whose minds were probably unhinged by the griefs of their existence. Any movement, besides, that was propagated by Mickiewicz, whose practical clear-headedness and whose great mental powers were well known, who was the object of so much love, seemed as though it must lead to the right way. And even if it did not, there were not wanting those who said that whither Mickiewicz went they too would go ; that if Adam erred, they would prefer to err with him.¹ The puerilities to which the beliefs and practices of the new religion descended, which men such as Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Goszczyński and other Poles of high gifts and talents frankly accepted as means to the regeneration of souls, are the most eloquent and the saddest illustration of the depths of misery to which the Polish exiles must have sunk before they could clutch at such straws for comfort. We now find Mickiewicz's great intellect busy with the significance of his trifling dreams ; convinced that every little

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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action of his was Heaven's inspiration, and consulting Towianski on each ; seeing the spirit of Napoleon under the shape of a brilliant star ; distributing to the members of the Circle bread-crumbs and bullets from Waterloo because the spirit of Napoleon dwelt in these remains.¹ This tragic mutilation of one of the noblest characters and grandest minds in Polish history is the tale of the best years of Adam Mickiewicz's manhood.

Then follows the sad story of his estrangement from his dearest friends, from those with whom he had lived as a brother during the long sorrows of their exile, by whom he was beloved above all others, and passionately revered as the spiritual leader of the nation. On this occasion they were far more clear-sighted than Mickiewicz was himself. From the beginning Towianski was regarded by them first with suspicion, then with full conviction of the danger of his doctrines. The history of this passage of Mickiewicz's life is so inseparably entwined with religious conflict that the English reader must put himself for a moment into the position of the greater part of the Polish nation in 1841, in order to realise the grief, the horror, with which they beheld Mickiewicz's fall. Devout Catholics, they saw him torn from the arms of the Catholic Church.² They saw the man from whom they had hoped so much for Poland dragged

¹ Z. Wasilewski, *From the Romantics to Kasprowicz*.

² He himself denied that he had ever left the Catholic Church. His idea seems to have been that so long as Towianism was not formally condemned by Rome, he was free to follow it. Yet he held and publicly proclaimed doctrines opposed to her teaching, and his former loyalty became in many respects an overt hostility.

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down into the dark mazes of a perilous species of pseudo-mysticism. They saw the genius of their greatest poet ruined, his voice silenced for ever, the powers of his mind and the affections of his heart warped and disfigured. They saw him lose all for the false prophet whose ingratitude was the only reward for the shipwreck of his life.

Stefan Witwicki, Montalembert, and Mickiewicz's old colleagues in the inner life were the first to take alarm. Alexander Jełowicki managed to secure an interview with Towianski, albeit with some difficulty, as the latter refused to grant audiences to any except to those who were prepared to accept his teaching without discussion. The colloquy was not successful, and Towianski would never see him again. Jełowicki had no better fortune with Adam himself. Of all men, Jełowicki was the least fitted to cope with any case of conscience that called for delicate handling. Rough and hot-headed by nature, his dealings with Mickiewicz seem to have been one blunder all through. Mickiewicz who, to judge from his allusions to the fact in his letters, was of an irritable temperament,¹ at last lost his temper, and, with a

His old friends looked upon him as one who had left the Church. "You have declared open war against Christ, against the Church, against the Holy Faith"; such, among many others of the like purport, is the expression used by Witwicki in his brochure, *Towianism Exposed*. We find the same sort of language in the correspondence of Mickiewicz's other friends. His exact religious standpoint is, however, a question for theologians to decide, and I leave it there.

¹ Shortly after Garczynski's death, Mickiewicz tells Odyniec how he could not keep his temper even with his dying friend. He

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violence new to him, he called Jełowicki a Pharisee and turned him out of the house.

Men, more gifted than Jełowicki and with whom Adam was bound by links of the sincerest affection, were equally unsuccessful. The Resurrectionists, summoned from Rome by Montalembert and others who had Mickiewicz's affairs and those of the emigration at heart, came to Paris to begin the struggle. Kajsiwicz spent hours with Adam, arguing and entreating, but all in vain. His private efforts having failed, he then determined to save the Polish colony in Paris and to denounce the doctrines of Towianism from the pulpit. Gifted with great eloquence, Kajsiwicz had entered the priesthood in order to labour for the spiritual welfare of his nation. From the Parisian pulpits he spoke to the Polish people in burning words of their sins ; told them openly that the sorrow that had come upon their country was the punishment of the Most High, and urged them to repentance.¹ The Poles thronged to hear him. The Towianists came too, and stood in a group by themselves while the preacher denounced the errors of their leader. Mickiewicz was there. "I listened,"

instances Claudia Potocka's unruffled sweetness under the same circumstances as a proof of the moral superiority of women over men. But—and the remark is interesting as being typical of Mickiewicz's ideals of friendship—"disputes and all the little sharpnesses we inflict upon each other are as much forgotten between friends as the little changes in the atmosphere in summer. Otherwise there would be no friendship. How often have I provoked my best friends and they me" (*Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz*. Letter to Edward Odyniec, November 13th, 1833).

¹ Count St. Tarnowski, quoted by Father Smolikowski in his *History of the Congregation of the Resurrection*.

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said he, "in silence and with profound pity."¹ Later this attitude changed and he would listen no longer. As Kajsiewicz mounted the pulpit, Mickiewicz made a sign to his fellow-votaries, and they left the church in a body.

Then in their turn other friends of Mickiewicz implored him to turn aside from the fatal path that he had entered. Domeyko, Mickiewicz's beloved Żegota, to whom Adam had so often poured out the sorrows of his soul, wrote to him from Chili words of entreaty and of warning.

"For the love of God," he cries, "do not swerve from Mother Church by but one step, though you should see the redemption of Poland only three steps off."²

Bohdan Zaleski at first suffered an agony of doubt as to where the truth lay. In 1843 he wrote:—

"Mary, protectress of the orphaned soul, let thy angels guard my steps, for I know not where to shield my head."³

But he presently saw clearly once again. With the deepest pain, he watched his dearest friend sink further and further into the abyss, and with him his cherished hopes for the nation that he had founded on that great character. In his sorrow the poet of the Ukraine went to the Holy Land on a pilgrimage for Adam's soul. He tells how there he wept and prayed; how, prostrating himself to the earth in one of the churches before a picture of the Good Shepherd, he

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² Father Paul Smolikowski, *Relations of Adam Mickiewicz with the Fathers of the Resurrection* (Polish). Cracow, 1898.

³ *Correspondence of Bohdan Zaleski* (Polish).

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could only sob out between his tears, "Oh, Lord, have mercy, mercy."¹

Adam and he drifted apart. The Towianists broke with those who did not hold their tenets. But however difficult the relations became between Mickiewicz and his friends, those who had once loved him loved him for ever, even through the cruellest test of friendship. "You know that I love you," Adam had said to the Resurrectionists even when they were at declared hostility with each other; and it was with equal pain to both sides that Mickiewicz and his best friends knew each other no more. Kajsiewicz sickened for grief. Bohdan Zaleski pined for the best loved companion of his exile. The estrangement and separation between Mickiewicz and Witwicki broke the latter's heart.

It may be remembered that Witwicki was one of the very few people whom Mickiewicz could bear to see during the days of his wife's first madness. Witwicki, a man of a gentle, retiring, and affectionate disposition, clung to Adam with intensest attachment. After, as he confesses, a long struggle with his conscience, he felt it his duty to publish a public refutation and exposition of Towianski which, under the circumstances, amounted to an attack upon Mickiewicz himself. Forced into the terrible position of being at open war with the friend whom he loved, he ends his pamphlet by a last passionate appeal:—

"Mickiewicz ! My beloved and unhappy Adam ! You who for so many years used to call me your friend and brother, and who were so indeed to me,

¹ Father Smolikowski, *op. cit.*

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you who know me as I know you, you will easily understand—no, now you will not understand—what grief has taken possession of my soul, what sadness has transpierced me when my hand penned this work where I have been forced to use so many even bitter words against you—against you whom I still love with my whole heart, and for whom I mourn a thousand times more than if I saw you dead before me. . . . Oh, for the love of Poland, for the sake of all your temporal and eternal future, come to the aid of the prayers with which we, your old and faithful friends, daily entreat God for you, and by His grace be once more our Mickiewicz of old ; bring back our brothers whom you have led to evil, be again what you once were—a faithful Christian, a great writer, the glory and example of your countrymen.”¹

In his correspondence with Zaleski, Witwicki tells something of the agony he experienced when Adam's heart turned against him, when he saw his overtures of friendship repulsed with coldness or violence as though he were Mickiewicz's worst enemy. What had passed between them may be gathered also from the following letter written by Witwicki to Adam.²

¹ Stefan Witwicki, *Towianism Exposed*.

² After Witwicki's death, Mickiewicz, shortly before his own death, requested Witwicki's brother to send him back all the letters that he had written to his former friend, and on receiving them he must have destroyed them, because they were not found among his papers. This brother, Antoni Witwicki, was apparently in miserable circumstances, for Mickiewicz sent him, evidently with great difficulty on account of the wretched state of his own finances, a gift of money. In the letter that Adam writes, asking Antoni to accept the present in his brother's name, he tells Antoni

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"DEAREST ADAM,—God alone can reconcile us. Oh, may He at least reconcile us when we go forth from the mistakes of this life, when we shake off this inconstant and sorrowful world. Together we served Him for a little moment on the earth, albeit feebly and imperfectly. God grant that together and for ever and in the perfection of the saints we may serve him in Heaven through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

"Farewell, dearest Adam. Farewell to all those ten years which, hand in hand and heart to heart, we passed together in a rare unison, Christians, Poles and poets. . . . I thank God that in that wandering and loneliness He gave me the comfort of your friendship. . . . I thank you for all the proofs of friendship that I received from you, for the love and confidence, which you constantly showed me till you changed. . . . May God's blessing be upon you all. Farewell; and before I become henceforth a perfect stranger to you, as you absolutely exact, allow me to embrace you once more, with all my heart and with my tears." ¹

how, in a manner painful to both, their friendship, for no personal cause, had been broken off for years before Stefan's death. But, added Mickiewicz, his memory had always remained dear to him, and, it being impossible for him to look upon his friend's brother with indifference, he will use every effort to help him, if he can find the means, for the future. Antoni Witwicki writes back, begging the poet, for his brother's sake, to give him courage to live his life, by writing to him if only twice a year (*Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz*, Paris, 1870. Letter to Antoni Witwicki, March 19th, 1855, and Editor's Note).

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz*. Letter of Stefan Witwicki to Adam Mickiewicz, March 1st, 1843.

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They were parted. Witwicki carried his breaking heart to Rome, whence he departed from the life that was darkened with the grief from which he never recovered. He rests—his sorrows over—beneath the shadow of San Lorenzo, in that most exquisite of cemeteries, around which stretches the mournful haunting beauty of the Roman Campagna.

Holding himself called to spread the new light that was to rise upon the world, Mickiewicz began to use his chair at the Collège de France as a pulpit whence to propagate Towianski's doctrines. Upon these occasions he spoke with burning fire and poetical fervour. Once he was walking to the College, uninspired and worried over the lecture that he was about to give. He met Towianski, and told the latter of his trouble. The mystic's only reply was to lead Adam to a pond, and, pointing with his stick, he talked to him at length upon the water-insect life. Mickiewicz threw himself with ardour into the subject. "What!" said Towianski, "you can listen with interest for half an hour about a heap of mud, and you can fail to have a subject on which to speak from the first professorial chair of the world in the cause of the redemption of your nation." Mickiewicz went straight to his lecture, and gave it in a passion of eloquence.¹ Then he took to never preparing his lectures. To bethink himself beforehand of what he was going to say seemed to him a want of faith. Light as to the great truths it was his vocation to proclaim would be given him at the moment. His lectures became flights of mysticism, sermons for the

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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Cause. But his poetical gifts he crushed and slew. After Towianski's appearance, he burnt his manuscripts. His ideal for poetry had become as unattainable even by that great genius as—which fact he soon discovered — was the ideal of continual exaltation which he demanded of his soul and of those of his co-disciples. He wrote to Zaleski during the first months of his devotion to Towianski :—

“Let other poets surpass us in every mastery, but to us one thing only is commanded : to raise not only poetry but the poet to a priesthood, which the poet has not reached since the times of Israel, and the way to which he has lost, and which only Dante sometimes and gropingly and here and there found.”¹

He now looked upon his past poetical creations as a swerving from the only true way. And yet it appears as if at times the greatest poet of Poland yearned to express his soul in the form that had so often brought him relief from pain. He now and then wrote something on scraps of paper ; but, always careless as to the fate of his manuscripts, he now destroyed them on principle. As often as the craving to write laid hold on him, an upbraiding conscience rose and told him that it was not lawful for him to do so. With the exception of one verse that a friend tore from the flames, not one of these fragments remains.

The work upon the Circle soon became a drain on Adam's strength that alone would have sufficed to choke a poet's inspiration. The French Government

¹ *Op. cit.*
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suspected Towianski of being a secret agent of Russia, and in the July of 1842 expelled him from France. The onerous task of managing the brotherhood then devolved upon Mickiewicz. Added to the work of his lectures, and his money difficulties, which were increased by his growing family of young children, Adam now lived in the continual strain of tuning his soul and those of the Circle to ecstasy. Those who had known him a few years before speak of the alteration in his face, of the terrible signs of spiritual suffering that marked it, how he had grown prematurely aged.

The meetings of the Circle began by being, according to the description of one of Towianski's most fervent converts, a paradise of joy, of ecstasy, of brotherly love. Mickiewicz worked upon each soul individually, spending himself upon them, exacting much of each and even more of himself.¹ As Towianski's representative, he preached at the gatherings of the Circle—impassioned sermons, to which I shall return in the following chapter. He taught them that he was the nearest to the truth who best understood Towianski's writings and who divined his wishes.² He exhorted them to the confession of their sins one to another, but only when they felt themselves to be in “full tone.” This “tone” could only be acquired at the cost of immense spiritual travail. To that public confession Mickiewicz attached so much importance that he even talked of it as a “sacramental confession.” He once set apart a

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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Sunday as a fast-day : namely, from morning to sunset the Towianists were to refrain from any action, conversation or thought not immediately connected with the Cause.

In this first period of his fervour, Mickiewicz gave himself rest neither by day or night, toiling in the cause of his new convictions, in the Circle. At intervals he would make a pilgrimage to Towianski's retreat in Brussels, or later in Switzerland, to seek spiritual direction for himself, and guidance in the affairs of the Cause in general. Exhausted by the high pressure at which he lived, his only recreation was in music or in rambles through the forest at Saint-Germain, where his friends gathered around him to talk of spiritualities and of Poland's resurrection. The mysticism in which his mind was entangled was a hard mistress. Although Mickiewicz dwelt nearer the realms of exaltation than his fellow-disciples ever succeeded in approaching, his soul, as theirs, sank to the earth, and he struggled in vain to reach those unattainable, elusive heights. It is touching to read his humble, childlike confessions of his failure in the letters that he wrote to Towianski, pouring out his troubled conscience, imploring for help. Through this curious and painful correspondence—painful if only that it illustrates the torture in which that great soul was held—the nobility of Adam's nature still never fails. Nothing, not even the exactions of a mystic's hallucinations, could destroy it. His simplicity of soul ; his whole-hearted and disinterested devotion to a cause that he believed was to save the world, and for which he gave up every-

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thing else on earth ; his humility before a man who did not possess one tenth of his own mental gifts ; such are the most salient characteristics of these spiritual confidences.¹ Scarcely a year after Mickiewicz had hailed Towianski's message as one that carried mankind to new realms of light and joy, he wrote to him as follows :—

“OUR DEAR MASTER,—Strengthen our Circle with your word, and nourish me. The Circle remains united, but there is but slight and feeble movement. I am more crushed than I am raised. You gave me a cry to the Lord, but power does not descend upon me. I often feel as if I were now a halting spirit, and doing penance in inaction, so much does my dark past and my crooked ways of old drag my soul back. Up to now I have no flight of soul. My home devours a great part of my strength. And I must constantly be on the watch to bind up and stop with my whole spirit the least fissure, so that evil may not force its way in. I alone am heavily weighed down in the Circle.”

Then he tells how the conversation of one of the brotherhood made such an impression on the person to whom it was addressed, that the latter repeated even the gestures that had accompanied it : “and,” says Mickiewicz, with a curious touch of Towianism, “he who can imitate some one's gestures must there-

¹ George Sand said that she looked upon Mickiewicz as a noble sick man. Lèbre, the Swiss writer, declared that he was “one of those men for whom, even when they are in error, there is no error, because they possess humility and love” (L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*).

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fore certainly be able to catch if only a small part of his spirit." He goes on to ask Towianski for advice how to deal with certain individuals whose souls he found difficult material : he mournfully confesses that as he talked long and earnestly with one of them, "I sinned by giving way to human irritation." And again he piteously calls upon the man in whom all his soul's hopes rested to come to his aid in the tribulations that beset his own interior life :—

"In my dreams I have oft-repeated and heavy struggles with hostile spirits, and as yet I have not dreamed even once that I have conquered them. Then they torture me, then I cry for help, then I flee. I always stand valiantly, but my strength fails. The same thing happens when I am awake.

"You once read to me some words about one of the brothers, where there was this expression : 'You will enter into peace, but the first who was called will serve the Cause sluggishly.' It seems to me that it was about me that you wrote this, and I should very much like to read those words over again. I should find in them instruction, and a warning for myself. Perhaps you could send me those words."¹

The spiritual director replied in his customary vague strain, urging Mickiewicz to redouble his efforts for the strengthening of the brethren, so that there should be no falling off in the "tone" which, "by the help of the Lord we have drawn out from

¹ *Participation of Adam Mickiewicz in the Cause of Andrew Towianski* (Polish). Paris, 1877. Letter to Andrew Towianski from Adam Mickiewicz, September 11th, 1842.

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our depths. There is nothing without that, and everything by it and for it." Adam may remember for his comfort in the straits of his own soul such as he has described that he has called many who dwelt on the pit of earth to a happier country, but still Towianski reminds his "dearest brother" that he must toil on and on at the raising and the freeing of his individual spirit.¹

Another time, writing to the Master apparently near some Easter-tide, Adam, in deep contrition, entreats Towianski to forgive him, before the dawn of the Resurrection, all by which, with or without his knowledge, he has ever sinned against Towianski's spirit from the moment of their meeting, since confession by word of mouth was for the moment, in Towianski's absence, impossible.²

That Towianski would never had had a following or hearing had it not been for Mickiewicz seems certain. Yet the prophet's firmly-rooted conviction was that his chief disciple did not work hard enough for the cause. He wrote to Adam—whose strength was being sapped by the superhuman efforts he made by night and day to carry on the apostolate—that he must labour yet more. Behind Mickiewicz's lectures at the Collège de France, there is always the figure of the absent Master, insisting that those lectures should become the mouthpiece of his religious tenets. They did become so, and consequently deprived Mickiewicz

¹ *Participation of Adam Mickiewicz in the Cause of Andrew Towianski.* Letter of Andrew Towianski to Adam Mickiewicz, September 18th, 1842.

² *Op. cit.*, letter of Adam Mickiewicz to Andrew Towianski, March 15th, 1844.

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of a congenial profession, and of his only means of livelihood. Eye-witnesses have described the poet as on these occasions he delivered his soul of the thoughts that burned in his heart. Leaning on his desk with his eyes raised to Heaven, his whole frame that of a man wearied and worn by suffering, he stood before his audience like one inspired, his beautiful voice ringing through the room in solemn and impassioned accents. As he spoke, an electric current seemed to run through his hearers. His fellow-countrymen wept; and not only they, for it is said that even an Englishman present was moved to tears. Sometimes, as though carried by some strange power out of themselves, those who listened would rise and stand in a body as if in response to his words. "The Lord blessed my lecture," was Mickiewicz's simple comment on these scenes.¹

At first, Mickiewicz contented himself with using Polish history and literature as the peg on which to hang the moral of the importance of enthusiasm, the duty of self-sacrifice and consecration. But in measure as Towianski spurred him on, and he himself became more and more deeply involved in his mystic theories, his lectures became their exposition. On March 19th, 1844, he openly proclaimed the new religion. Announcing that he was the bringer of a new life, of a high truth :—

"The joy that I have felt, and which will not be taken away from me, the joy that I have felt to be commissioned to tell you of, will be the joy of all my life, and of all my lives; and as I do not speak from books, as I do not expose a system

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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to you, I proclaim myself before Heaven the living witness of the new revelation. And I dare venture to call upon those Poles and those French, who are among you and who know the revelation, to answer me as living men : ‘ Does that revelation exist, yes or no ? ’ ”

Every Towianist present, and several of the younger French members of the audience, rising, and stretching out their hands, cried “ Yes.”

He then summoned those who had seen the revelation “ incarnate, and who recognise that their Master exists,” to give their testimony in the same manner. They again rose and answered in the affirmative, their hands again stretched out.

“ Then now, my brothers,” said Mickiewicz, “ my task before God and you is finished. May this moment give you all that joy and all the vast hopes with which I myself am filled.”¹

As he left the lecture-room, two of his followers kissed his hand. The audience followed him out, as though suddenly awakened from a dream, some amused, others plunged in shame and distress.²

Mickiewicz’s days in the chair of Slavonic literature were henceforth numbered. From that hour, the French Government watched suspiciously the

¹ Adam Mickiewicz, *L’Église et le Messie*, the published course of Mickiewicz’s lectures at the Collège de France, 1843-44. The preceding lectures are published under the name of *Les Slaves*, and *L’Église Officielle et le Messianisme*.

² “ The Polish name and her chief literary glory, which foreigners had just learnt to revere, is given over to ridicule and contempt. The Slavonic chair, one of the weapons providentially given into Polish hands, has been wantonly used for evil ” : so wrote Kajsiwicz in the bitterness of his heart (Father Smolikowski, *Relations of Adam Mickiewicz with the Fathers of the Resurrection*).

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enunciation of his mystical theories, so closely bound with his political tenets and his Napoleonic worship. But no consideration of prudence or of his own safety or material well-being could deter Mickiewicz from any course in which he honestly believed himself to be on the right path. In some doubt as to the line that duty called him to take in the matter of the lectures, he applied to Towianski for counsel. The latter bade him continue in the direction that he had begun. Mickiewicz did so, well aware that this meant the loss of his profession, and with it the return of himself and his family into financial straits. With the sword hanging over his head, he wrote to his brother : " I am better in health and livelier and happier than ever." Telling him that the French Ministry was prepared to pension him handsomely if only he would consent to cease his work for the Cause, he says :—

" I might sell myself dearly. But conscience . . . does not allow me to halt on the way. And I have the conviction that if I am faithful to the inner voice, nothing evil will befall me, although the future is full of dangers before me. You and I are now old, life has passed away like a little moment, and we shall give an account only of how we used it for the good of others and of our country. I hope that I shall still see you on this earth and in better times, and I should be glad for you to have confidence in God that we shall still see Lithuania, our own Lithuania no longer Russian. I live on that and for that, and, God willing, I shall live to see it."¹

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Francis Mickiewicz, May 9th, 1844.

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But before the blow fell, a well-wisher of the poet's, anxious to save him from the difficulties that were gathering round him, tried to send him on an important literary mission to Italy. But Adam refused to accept it. His post was with the Circle; the one mission of his life was to labour for the Cause; in Paris and with the Circle he must therefore remain.

He did remain. In these days another friend wrote to him entreating him to retrace his steps while there was yet time. That friend was one who had the best right to speak, for he had himself passed through a like battle: it was Montalembert. Thanking Adam for a volume of his lectures that he had given him, and regretting that he had nothing of his own writing to send him on his side:—

“In return, I offer you the help, however ineffectual it may be, of the prayers of a soul which will always have for yours a tender and deep solicitude. Our conversation of the other day moved me painfully. You are on the way to the abyss—that abyss, where one falls with more or less *éclat* and noise, but whence one never comes forth, once one has gone down into it. Ah! if you had never been a Catholic, you would be far more excusable. But you have known and tasted the true light; and now because one cloud, such as there have always been and as there always will be, has passed between you and the sun, you want to reform and replace that immortal sun of the Church. Ah! how far more useful you would have been to your country and your century if, like all truly great geniuses, you

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had known how to bind yourself by the bonds of humility and obedience. *Vir obediens loquetur victoriam,* say the Scriptures.

“Good-bye! may God bless you, enlighten you and save you! There is no wish in my soul more frequent and more ardent.”¹

But Adam stayed where he was. His heart was filled with his strange mystic adoration of Napoleon. On the eve of the latter’s death-day, he preached to the Circle, impressing upon them the necessity of uniting themselves in spirit with the dead hero, of meditating on his death. With that thought fresh in his mind, he spoke, with his usual curious blending of mysticism and political ideas, against the House of Orleans. He distributed to his audience pictures of Bonaparte, on which he had inscribed texts from the New Testament and the sentence : “Plus avant dans la vérité divine, plus fort pour la réaliser, il consomme ce qu’il a commencé.”

That lecture of May 28th, 1844, was the last time that Mickiewicz’s voice was heard in the Collège de France. The French Government expelled him from his chair, and Adam and his family were once more plunged into poverty.

“Who does not feel,” Mickiewicz wrote once to a friend (and although this letter is of a later date, it is so appropriate to this episode that I follow Mr. Ladislas Mickiewicz’s example and quote it here), “how painful it is to see one’s good desires for the

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter from Charles de Montalembert to Adam Mickiewicz, (original in French), May 3rd, 1844.

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nation despised and repaid with ingratitude? But the Pole must seek only in his own conscience the source of his work and its recompense, trusting that Providence will reward pure work. In these days, woe unto him who depends on the opinion and judgment of men, or on anything outside his own conscience. We must seek the road, we must even shake off every one that tries to stifle us, but we must remove that obstacle without anger and with the hope of reaching the pure field. . . . Peace is well for the dead and happy. We of necessity disturb the world and must disturb it. I will therefore go further on my road, and I hope that somewhere on it I shall find all men of good-will because they have but one aim.”¹

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Count Joseph Grabowski, January 22nd, 1847.

CHAPTER IX

THE END (1844-1855)

"I was transfixed to my Poland with body and with soul. All her feelings I took unto myself, except despair. I poured her tears, her blood, into the chalice of my heart. I gathered to my bosom her every cry of pain, and bound it to the strained string of my soul. I am dust, but with a heart in which the mourning of the nation sobs, with a lyre upon my breast through which millions weep."

SEVERYN GOSZCZYNSKI.

THE last eleven years of Adam Mickiewicz's mortal pilgrimage are little more than a chronicle of a soul struggling in the toils. They are marked by few, if any, outward events, save those two attempts to found a Polish legion in Italy and in Turkey respectively, both of which were doomed to the failure that dogged all Mickiewicz's patriotic enterprises, and the last of which he sealed with his death. The closing span of his term on earth shows us a man beaten down by sorrow and disappointment, but who still faced the battle of life with an undisturbed and intrepid heart: a man who lived for the comforting and strengthening of his brother-Poles and fellow-men; ever toiling, in every way save that to which his star had pointed him, for the welfare and redemption of his beloved nation, seeking it in each turn of political events in Europe, and especially in France, never to find it, yet never to lose his unshaken faith. His was, in marked degree, that eternal ever-youthful hope that seems, by

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some strange irony of fate, to be the birthright of the children of tragic Poland.

Mickiewicz had now lost all. He had lost his chair and with it the only means of self-support and self-expression that were still left to him. He had lost not admiration or love, for these followed him to his death and beyond his death : but clouds of misunderstanding and painful alienation had divided him and his oldest friends. His splendid gift of song was dead.

And all these things he had parted with for his nation's sake. He had made a grievous and an irreparable mistake. He had followed what had seemed to him the rising of the noontide splendour, but what turned out to be a will-o'-the-wisp, leading the traveller into the morass from which he never entirely rose again. But it must never be forgotten that it was through his passionate love for his nation that he went astray. Because Towianski had held out a promise of salvation for his country, Mickiewicz followed him and sank into the pit. Truly it may be said that it was for Poland that, in the words of the Polish painter-poet Wyspianski, his heart and mind were consumed, that he chose the road of stones, "and toils most painful."¹ He fell through the very nobility of his nature.

When the chair of Slavonic literature was his no more, Mickiewicz threw himself unreservedly into his work with the Circle. Young men, to whom he was ever a subject for heart-felt veneration, came to

¹ Stanislas Wyspianski, *The Legion*. This curious and interesting drama has for its subject Mickiewicz's efforts to throw off Towianski's yoke at the same time that he was endeavouring to organise the Polish legion in Rome. Wyspianski, the chief Polish poet of latter days, died in 1907.

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his house for spiritual advice. Strangers wrote to him, imploring for guidance. At this time, Mickiewicz lived in a state of continual exaltation. Both by day and night, every fibre of his being worked, without halt or rest, for the Cause. So strongly did he believe that the great events for which he hoped were at hand that he once preached to the Circle on "The Vigil of the Deed." These sermons of Mickiewicz's contain the most exalted truths, jewels of pure beauty, mingled with the chaff of extravagant pseudo-mysticism. Upon one occasion—in this discourse to which I have just alluded—he told his listeners how it behoved them all to feel ready for the deed—not that deed which they all desired, but that which God desired for them and which might indeed be contrary to their own desire. Let us work, said he fervently, to feel what it is to which God is calling us; that is the whole question, and to that all the labours of the soul must be directed. No man predestinated to a great vocation ever came with his work cut out for him and ready trimmed; but the seed is within each man's soul, to be wrought out by toil, by seeking God's will and acting according to inspiration and signs from Heaven. All must watch and keep the vigil of the journey to Jerusalem. Every movement of impatience, of ill-will or anger, is a great sin, because it is the fruit of faithlessness. Faith and trust must be the standard of the brotherhood, and they must devote each evening to self-examination on whether the day had been spent according to that standard. With faith in God, Adam said that he himself was able to do the most difficult things.¹

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*
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External victory, he said another time, could only be the brethren's after they had attained it in the region of the soul. A holy life was the condition of that inspiration on which he built so much. The greatness of the heroes of history depended on the length of time that they could remain in exaltation of spirit. Towianski was the incarnation of the word, the first of men who had not wasted the highest inspirations. Only with the pure "tone" of the Master was it possible to conquer earth. Each Towianist must be ready for Napoleon's call; the Polish members of the confraternity must teach the French to live as though they were to be presented to Napoleon. A species of semi-mystical, semi-political apostolate—always very closely linked in Mickiewicz's system—was to be exercised by the Pole on his French brother. Each Polish unit in the Circle must work upon his soul till he feels that when he goes about the streets of Paris he can become the point of support for the Frenchman to lean upon. Dreams also played a large part in the life of the Towianist. Mickiewicz taught that dreams were the highest degree of intuition and of the soul's hearkening; by them man becomes a carnate part of what is incarnate.¹ Mickiewicz's hope for the regeneration of nations was in the people, not the upper classes. Sluggishness of the soul, trust in material things, the use of reason in spiritual matters—these are always the objects of his abhorrence and what he urges the brotherhood to abjure. All depends on the soul's simplicity. That Mickiewicz had some difficulty himself in bringing his intellect to

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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the required submission, we know. He confessed to Towianski that he had suffered more labour in crushing his understanding than he had undergone in obtaining it. And once with tears he reproached himself that he could not acquire the heart of a little child.¹

Then, in the midst of wild wanderings, the same man who could publicly pray to the "Spirit of the Master" that his disciples should share the emotion with which he had filled them ;² who had at one of his lectures considered himself as the incarnate spirit of all Slavonia ;³ that same man, returning to his nobler self, could say in a speech given before a Polish historical society that Poland had lost all, but one sign remained to her—the Cross. He could preach an Easter sermon to the gathering of his fellow-votaries and brother-Poles in which, moved to the heart, he uttered these words of dignity and pathos :—

"Great and significant is that feast on which the old religion sought redemption in the blood of the lamb, and the new has founded the redemption of the world in the sacrifice of Christ the Lamb. But this feast is the greatest in all Christendom for our nation, which in the Resurrection sees a mystic hope with that presentiment long divined by every Polish home in the keeping of this solemn festival, and which now has entered into our souls, that soon we shall keep it in very deed on Polish soil."⁴

Mickiewicz was fast becoming distracted with the

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

² *Participation of Adam Mickiewicz in the Cause of Andrew Towianski.*

³ M. Zdziechowski, *Mesyanists and Slavophiles.*

⁴ *Participation of Adam Mickiewicz in the Cause of Andrew Towianski.*

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burden of his own soul and of those souls under his rule. The Circle now presented a very different spectacle to what Towianski's earliest converts had seen in it. It had become a gathering of the mentally diseased. Every trifle spoke to the overstrung imaginations of the men and women who composed it as a sign from on high. Each dream was a command from Heaven. The dreamer imposed his dream as a Divine mandate on his brethren, and, if the latter refused to obey its bidding, violent recriminations and quarrelling ensued. After frantic efforts at exaltation, a spell of stupor of the soul would follow. Spiritual tyranny was now the distinguishing mark of this tormented religious sect. Mickiewicz attempted to check these disorders and to lead the brethren not merely to ecstasy of spirit, but to prove their inner powers by acts. On this rock he and Towianski finally split. So far from effecting anything, the followers of the prophet who had seemed to initiate a new and higher life were weighed down in spiritual sloth, in atrophy. Not one of Towianski's promises, political or religious, had come true : yet the Circle still lived on in frenzied expectation, taking each event, however small, for the beginning of the realisation of the Master's prophecies. In vain did Adam endeavour to unite them and to bring something practical out of their midst. But his eyes were being opened, and he began to recognise the mistakes of the man for whom he laboured. His devotion to the person of Towianski was still unshaken. In the April of 1845 he sought him out in Einsiedeln with the hope of obtaining relief and guidance in his perplexities. In that picturesque mountain-shrine, the two Polish

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mystics walked about the hills, while Towianski talked to Adam of his soul. Retiring to Rychterschwyl, Towianski's headquarters, Adam gave himself up wholly for a while to meditation on the master's written and spoken words.¹

But although for all Towianski's treatment of him Mickiewicz admired his personal character to the end of his days, insurmountable difficulties had arisen between them. The fact that the system of Towianski gave no visible and practical result of the light that was supposed to burn in the souls of those who followed it ; the want of any deeds corresponding to their beliefs ; was a constant rock of scandal to Mickiewicz, who, in his dealings with himself and his fellow-men, had always insisted on action, not words. Towianski had put away the idea of a native land on earth, and talked of a heavenly and supernatural country. Mickiewicz pined unceasingly for the Poland of his heart. Towianski, desirous that the result of every political event should be to teach truth to souls, taught that such events could bring no good result before their spiritual teaching had worked. But Mickiewicz held that the best way of propagating truth is to save one's fellow-

¹ On the occasion of this visit to Switzerland, whither at an earlier stage of his Towianistic convictions he had sent missionaries to spread them, Mickiewicz visited his old quarters at Lausanne. Enthusiastically welcomed by the students, he spoke to them, telling them that the greatness of a nation does not depend on the magnitude of her territory. He gave them the keynote of his life when he said : "I am the son of a nation which, although great, has now no material existence in Europe, and which, I am convinced of it, will acquire a greater one than ever before. That conviction gives me strength to live and work" (L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*).

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man, whether he first recognise the means of his salvation or no. Again, Towianski maintained that man can only show in deeds what he carries within him : Mickiewicz—far more practical—clung to the theory that a good deed in itself helps a sick soul to its healing : to practise the great ideals of Christian self-sacrifice were, said he, the surest road to comprehension of its laws.¹ Towianski exacted that the weapons with which man works must be perfect : Adam, knowing that this would mean the impossibility of doing anything in this world at all, called men to do the best they could with the imperfect weapons at their disposal.²

Even the efforts of a man like Mickiewicz could not keep the Circle together or preserve any semblance of peace in their midst. Since the beginning, the number of Towianski's adherents had not increased. Deserters daily fell from Adam's side. Machinations and betrayals were what he had to face. He had lost his professorial chair because he had preached Towianism. His hair was white, his frame broken and aged, with the strain of toiling night and day to fulfil the exactions of the new religion : but Towianski's constant complaint, echoed by that section of his following who still adhered closely to his precepts, was that Mickiewicz had not wrought sufficiently for the Cause. Towianski now openly refused to uphold Adam's work in the Circle. Mickiewicz found that what he opposed his leader would at once support. Adam urged the brotherhood to action. Towianski bade them wrap

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Mémorial de la Légion Polonoise de 1848.*

² L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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themselves in a sort of spiritual dream, while he himself set them the example by retiring into complete passiveness, refusing to break the tranquillity of his soul by so much as looking at a letter, shutting his ears to the disciples' despairing letters crying for his help, that lay unanswered for months in his room.¹ At last Mickiewicz, driven desperate, worn out by his fruitless labours, sick and sleepless from his harassed and overstrained soul, wrote to Towianski, frankly telling him that it were better to leave every one to manage their spiritual affairs by themselves, to let them strive in the way best suited to their own nature. Towianski's reply was to depose Adam from his leadership of the Circle, and to complain that Mickiewicz had taken the part of earth.

In sore doubt and distress of heart, the poet went again in 1846 to Switzerland to confer with Towianski. Acting in his official capacity, he spoke strongly to the Master of the disorders reigning in the brotherhood. Towianski would listen to no details, and bade Adam, to whose guidance he had himself entrusted the souls of his disciples, to think of his own sins and to leave those of others alone. Henceforth the Master gave out to the Circle that the soul of Brother Adam had fallen into its former night, after it had beheld the dawn.²

That journey of Mickiewicz's to Switzerland was made with the single and immovable purpose of discovering the road that his duty pointed him to take. Whatever Mickiewicz's mistakes in life, none have

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² L. Mickiewicz, *op. cit.*

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ever denied that all through those sinuous paths on which he was now travelling, he acted in genuine good faith, prepared to follow unflinchingly whatever he deemed the true course. His hope, in approaching Towianski on this occasion, was that he could reconcile with his own higher voices the teaching of the mystic who still held his love and strong reverence, and whose doctrines had in the beginning appealed to his deepest feelings.¹ As we have already seen at various crises in his history, Mickiewicz's soul—that soul that was strung so high and that was the master of such great powers—had been called to battle and to tempest, to nights of conflict that left their enduring stamp not only on himself, but also on the literature of his nation. Now, again, during this visit to Zurich, he went through a struggle, a spiritual agony, that nearly took away his life. For three days, he was nigh to death. Those surrounding Towianski made every effort to keep in their thraldom the man who had been instrumental in spreading Towianski's dogmas. They had recourse to a measure that Mickiewicz's friends never forgave them, but upon which the poet himself was heard to utter no word of the indignation that he must have felt. Towianski's wife dreamed—or said that she dreamed—that she had seen Adam's mother appearing to her son, warning him that his soul was in grievous peril, and that, if he left the path mapped out by Towianski, he would die in three days' time. But for all his belief in the significance of dreams, Mickiewicz was not one whom any consideration would force into a line that his conscience disapproved. Although

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*
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he admired many of Towianski's theories, he disapproved, as we have seen, of the way in which Towianski exacted their practice ; and he refused to remain any longer in bondage to an unpractical dreamer or to sacrifice the individual conscience to Towianski's methods. Painful as it must have been to him to swerve from this friend of his heart, he would work no more under his direction.

He returned to Paris. The opinions of those who met him in the years following that journey to Zurich differ so much upon the subject that it is impossible to know how far he had renounced Towianism. Some say that he clearly acknowledged that Towianski had erred, and that he regretted bitterly those lectures of his, by which he had spread the delusions of his teacher. To one, he openly said that, did Rome condemn Towianski, he would make a public retraction of his errors.¹ His exact spiritual position from this hour is, however, most difficult to grasp. He worked no more in the original Circle, from which several members followed him : but a little band of adherents gathered about him, to whom he still preached the doctrines on which he had built his life, but now on his own and more practical lines. Yet the shadows of the captivity in which he had dwelt so long still seem to have clung about him. The pantheistic and transmigratory ideas of Towianski's school were still heard from his lips. But his passionate fervour for the cause of Towianski was no more : and gradually communications broke off between him and the Master, till a long, unbroken silence reigned between them. Caught as he had been

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewics.*

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in the meshes for so many years, probably by now his own mind was in confusion and he knew not where he stood.

In 1847, Towianski made some effort to win Mickiewicz back. He wrote him a letter, reminding him of his former ardour in the Cause, expressing the hope that hell was not going to triumph, and summoning Mickiewicz back from the "crooked paths" where he now walked.

Mickiewicz answered him; and the outspoken letter that he sent to the man who had wrecked his life, but whom he ever loved, speaks for itself. It considerably widened the breach between the two.

"MASTER AND LORD,—The very sight of your writing moved me to the joy that your word always wakes in us. That joy was not full, and God alone knows whether it will last. It would be full, if it were manifested in the degree and in the manner which you desire; and it can only last if it shows itself in fruit, in deeds.

"You summon me, brother, to that moving of the spirit with which we were transported in Nanterre, gathered around you.¹ Even before Nanterre, after our first gatherings, my spirit was on fire, and the other brothers hastened to announce the cause. Your power, proceeding from self-sacrifice, gathered all those sparks into one flame."² Later that flame burst

¹ In the earlier history of Towianism, its followers met at Nanterre, which was the scene of their first fervour.

² Mickiewicz, preaching to the Circle in 1845, had told them that deed, being the fruit of spiritual self-sacrifice, is the greatest thing to which each of us are called. That sacrifice could not be fulfilled without "our lord" (Towianski), because his life was

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forth from us often powerfully and burned for long. A spark of it has up to now still remained in each of us ; it awakes in our solitary labour or in our intercourse with each other. Oh, that all would burn with that flame, as of old and more sincerely! This is our common desire ; this we look for ; for this we labour. So far we have no results. Whether our powers are increased, we do not know ; and our position has become very difficult.

"For when you appeared to us, nobody then stood between you and the chosen people. All came from your spirit into our souls, from our souls to your spirit it at once returned. Later on, we others came between you and your Circle with a different method of government. We starved our brothers. Your method of government starved our country. As many times as we played the master without having the spirit of the Master within us, so many times we starved others. That spirit entered into us and acted only at given moments, yet we ruled for years ; therefore the nourishment was momentary, and the starvation long. Government, the servant of the spirit of earth or rather the slave . . . the slave Government brought forth a timid word, thrust it forth, made homage to the spirit of the earth, and therefore did not bring forth the word in its fulness ; and it could not bring it forth in its fulness, not being itself full in the spirit and form that to you only is given. Then Government might have con-

one continual self-sacrifice ; "although he is an exile and a wanderer, yet in his soul he is the lord of earth." (M. Zdziechowski, *Mesyanists and Slaveophiles.*)

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spired against the spirit of earth and affrighted it ; but it could not make it totter on its throne. Yet to that it is called ; to that you call, and others press on. Will it come to that ? God knows ; but, in spite of swervings and falls, there is progress. It knows it, and that feeling none can tear away from it.

“ By that feeling we live. By what else could we live ?

“ That moving of the spirit, which you called forth by your self-sacrifice, belonging only to God, placed in your hands, we tried to reach. After a little moment of fire manifested in your presence—of a fire that passed away and that was sometimes *connterfeited*—we were fain to buy that moving. We thought that your blessing, communion with you, would give us power over our country. We exposed that moving of souls to view, as an ornament to our emptiness ; we handed on that moving from one to the other, as though it were some lifeless inventory, thrust from hand to hand. We commanded the brothers to rejoice or grieve, to love or hate, although we often did not possess within ourselves that feeling of grief or joy, to which we summoned them ! The great number of those who gave commands multiplied these orders that often contradicted each other, and yet each of which it was incumbent to obey.

“ We who commanded, being ourselves wanting in faith, being in emptiness of soul, in torment ; unable to bear the loneliness that was on us and that showed us our own nothingness ; we vented ourselves on the brothers, we inflicted sufferings on them, so as to divert ourselves tragically with the sight of their

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tortures. It came to this, that the rulers became like weak tyrants who can only keep themselves warm by baths of blood. The baths were taken from a brother's soul! The less we felt in ourselves of freedom, strength and life, the more loudly we called for life. We obtained an artificial life. . . . We took from the brothers their last remaining liberty, that which is respected by every tyrant—the liberty of *silence*. The brothers gave a proof of their fear of God and reverence for you, inasmuch as they endured all this in your name, in order to be able to remain in the Circle which was ever becoming more cramped and ever more oppressed. . . .

“When our difficult condition on the earth harassed us, we forced the brothers to make disturbances, to begin revolutions, not in the least caring if it were in agreement with the Divine thought. Those brothers who held back we accused of sloth; but we ourselves had no intention of showing ourselves, saying openly that we were called to something greater. We wished to use that moving of the spirit to get a good position on the earth.

“When God did not give us this grace that our very spirit, our very faces should summon others to gather around us, to exaltation, to reverence of us, we sought to supply our physical lack by reproaches, by outcries; and whom we could not frighten into it, we proclaimed behind their backs as criminals and rebels. For every one, whenever and however he did not agree with us, or rather was not our echo, was given out as a rebel. We exercised the saddest power that there is on earth. . . .

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"We were fain to justify that power by uniting it to spiritual power. Therefore, we reiterated that we spoke and commanded by the spirit, although we did not feel the spirit within us. Each moment we terrified the brothers, stupefied with such commands, by threatening them with Divine punishments. We invoked those punishments. We rejoiced when grief or misfortune befell a brother. We repulsed him, we trod him down. We became like a pack of wolves who tear and devour their wounded comrade."

He then enlarged in strong language upon the spiritual terrorism that reigned in the Circle, and the fears that had taken possession of the souls of the brotherhood, foreseeing the tortures and the bondage that awaited it at the hands of its oppressors.

"Master and Lord," he concludes, "after all this, it is difficult for us to return to that trust, to that sincerity, with which we were wont to assemble years ago: and without these there is no fire, there is no action. And we shall not return thither, until each of us feels how he was guilty, interiorly abjures his sin, and communicates the spirit to his brothers, free from judgments, condemnations, and suspicions. . . . We are working on that. In the meantime, we are trying to preserve a spark of the spirit. We have not destroyed faith, hope, and love. We cease not to cry to God. We beseech the Mother of God, our Mother, to intercede for us; because of all her children we are in the heaviest plight. We trust in God's mercy. The hidden mysteries of God's wrath have been and are often manifested to many mortals. The hidden and more abundant mysteries of God's

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mercy are more deeply, more highly hidden. The Heavenly Father visits the sinful children unexpectedly, and surprises them with sudden consolation. So He visited us and surprised us with joy by your apparition among us years ago. So we believe that, in the moment known to Him and in the manner known to Him, He will visit us again and comfort us with His grace. — Your Brother, Servant and Disciple,

“ADAM MICKIEWICZ.”¹

Men and women, mystics of every nation, came to Adam's house to seek his counsel. Political exiles from all countries, Russians, Poles, Italians, Irish, the brilliant French *literati* of the day, were all to be seen in his simple and poor dwelling.² He felt it his duty to give his help to all who asked it ; but he naively owned that those like his former disciples, now become his enemies, who visited him for the sake of quarrelling with him rather than as spiritual suppliants, were a relief, “for,” said he, “it is easier to fight anybody than to raise him.”³ The suffering and the sorrowful knew him as a friend whose heart went out to them with sympathy and pity. To the English reader it is interesting to learn that two of his visitors were Gabriele Rossetti, the famous father of a more famous son and daughter, and Emerson's disciple, Margaret Fuller. Margaret Fuller, holding

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Andrew Towianski, May 12th, 1847.

² His favourites among foreign refugees were the Irish. The last English book that he ever read, and which was found lying on his bureau after he started on the journey to the East from which he never returned, was a work by an Irish Nationalist.

³ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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the belief that the man or woman who was to herald in the new epoch was already somewhere in the world, came to Europe to find him or her. Having read a lecture of Mickiewicz's on Emerson, whose writings he greatly admired, she asked permission to make his acquaintance, and paid him a visit. They were mutually pleased with each other : and so moved was the lady by Adam's conversation that as he talked she, with a touch of early Victorian sensibility, fainted away on the sofa.¹

Apart, too, from personal intercourse, Adam's pen busied itself with writing directions for the inner life to absent friends. Extracts from these letters show the curious mingling of the vague mysticism learnt from Towianism with the dictates of his own practical sense

"I hope," he writes to a Polish lady, "that you are freer and happier than you were. I hope that you maintain in yourself your awakened interior life, the movement of the soul. I know that it is difficult. Everything that surrounds you will cool your fervour, lower you, entangle you. Often recollect yourself, take refuge in the depths of your soul, and from thence draw strength. Would to God that you had that living faith that strength proceeding from its right source will conquer all things ; then would you feel your own life easier, and you would make that of others easier to them. You wrote to me from Brussels that it was painful to you to have parted from me with a misunderstanding. You accuse me of some anger against you. Perhaps by now you

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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see otherwise, perhaps you have already felt that my conduct proceeded from real respect for you, from sincere manly love, and from the wish that I could see you as quickly as possible as free, strong and vigorous externally as you are in your soul. You will not attain that liberty, you will not find your road on earth, if you do not have constantly before your eyes the higher aim of which we spoke so much. *And it is not enough to have it burning before our eyes, we must travel to it. That travel is the essence of life, and all the rest is only the accident. You know how dear your friendship is to me, and we must look upon that friendship only as a relation sweetening the toil of life to us, as a guide to the higher aim. And who does not toil, does not struggle to sweeten his life? Let us deserve each other's friendship which, I hope, will be ever purer and ever more salutary for us both.”¹

In another letter to the same lady, he gives her directions impregnated with Towianistic ideas as to her spiritual intercourse with others; he tells her how terribly she will suffer if she loses the spark of the new life that has been lit within her soul.

“It is a great thing to know with whom to speak in the spirit and how to speak. We must first of all humbly pray, collect ourselves, and try to feel the state of the person on whom we have to work.”

He warns her to be careful before whom she pours out her soul.

“Avoid people who are contented with themselves

¹ Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to Madame Constantia Łubienska (1847?)

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and with their condition, who do not suffer moral hunger, who do not yearn, who do not attempt. Christ the Lord called those who suffer and are burdened, and they who were satisfied and tranquil did not receive Him. Let us remember that, if it went well for us on earth, we, too, would be far from the truth.

“Wherever you see tenderness of soul, emotion, one tear, sympathy, and particularly pain with the present and desire and hope for the future, seek there a brother, be he peasant, husbandman or Jew, be open with him. He will do more than all those who, now in prominent places on the earth, appear to be somebody.”¹

Now that he had got rid of his labour in the Circle, Mickiewicz’s life was freer. But still he toiled for Poland : he still strove ever for the end which he himself said was that for which all men and women must live, namely, that this world shall be a better place for those who come after us.² His house—galled by poverty—was the refuge where other Poles, needier even than himself, found a shelter. We hear of one being given room there until he could find work to do, another taken in and cared for in sickness. But poverty was not the only shadow that rested over the home. After Adam’s return from Zurich, Celina went in her turn for a spiritual interview with the Master. She returned in deeper bondage than ever, and the instrument through which Towianski attempted

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to Madame Constantia Łubienska, October 5th (1847?).*

² L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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to influence Adam. The souls of the husband and wife were parted and domestic peace destroyed.

"It is not possible to give you a clear idea about my condition," so Adam writes to his brother in 1847. "You know in what times we live, consider what a tempestuous town I live and work in, and then you can explain many things for yourself. My life is hard. It was always hard and full of wanderings, and, as you know, externally unhappy, although not without interior consolations, and sometimes even brighter days."

He says that the good material things of the world could have been his, if he had begun to live for himself only :

"If I had renounced what I carry in my soul, and what moves me and gives me life and comforts me. I shall therefore follow my star, and I hope that I will always see it clearer. I have still much to do. . . . Only always be sure that it [his work] will follow the same foundation on which we grew up in our parents' house. I am often comforted thinking that, although we brothers have so little intercourse with each other, we are all still certain of one another, and I know that you do not doubt for a moment that in every event you would find me and Alexander and George (if he is still alive) as devoted brothers as you knew us at home. It is a rare consolation on the earth to be in harmony and near, at least, in soul, if we can help each other in no way on earth."¹

After his first absorption in Towianski's religion

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Francis Mickiewicz, 1847.

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was over, Mickiewicz began to take more notice again of his children. When in 1848 the little daughter who had been such a delight to him in his earlier days fell ill of fever, the father of her childhood seemed well-nigh given back to her. He sat by her bed for hours, telling her stories to amuse her, carrying her about in his arms. Then, returning in a measure to his old habits, he took the children for very long rambles. Sometimes they all went in a body on an expedition to find mushrooms, which the poet was fond of gathering because they reminded him of the mushroom hunts in Lithuania, which he has described so fondly in *Thaddeus*. On one occasion when the family spent a little time by the seashore, Mickiewicz would show his children every detail of the life of the marine vegetation and of the sea-creatures. Natural history never lost its interest for him. When they moved once into a house with a garden, whose delights made the children, says the poet's eldest daughter, forget their sorrows—it was just at the time that their father was submerged in his new mysticism — Mickiewicz made this daughter keep a diary of the doings of her fowls, which he never forgot to read:¹

In 1848 Mickiewicz turned his steps to Rome. Events, pointing to great historical changes, seemed about to take place, and Mickiewicz, who in all such happenings saw a chance for his country and for the spiritualisation he so ardently desired of the governments on earth, determined to approach Pius IX. on behalf of Poland. Nor was this all. Mickiewicz was at the spiritual cross-roads. He yearned to reconcile

¹ M. Gorecka, *Recollections of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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himself to the Church with which, if he had not actually left it, his relations had become far from happy. He clung, moreover, to the hope that the tenets which had become his life, and in whose service he had sacrificed so much, would be found by Pius IX. compatible with the teaching of the Holy See. To Rome, therefore, he went. Seventeen years ago he had gone forth from the Eternal City, filled with the fire of early manhood, in the full splendour of his genius, to give his nation her two greatest poems. He re-entered her walls a white-haired man, to whom grief had long been a familiar and a daily guest, worn and broken with the straining of his soul, his very face changed and carrying stamped upon it the ravages of protracted spiritual anguish ; but, be it said to his eternal honour, with the moral beauty of his character still shining forth undestroyed.¹

He took up his quarters as close as might be to those of his former friends, the Resurrectionists, who were at that time living at San Claudio. In the Via del Pozzetto—the dark and narrow little street that runs between Sant' Andrea delle Fratte and San Claudio—we may still see the house, marked by a mural tablet recording the fact, where Mickiewicz lodged. After spending the first few days of his stay in Rome in strict retirement, he went to San Claudio. Throughout their now strained relations, the affection between Mickiewicz and the Resurrectionists had not really died. Entering the recreation room where the Fathers were assembled, Adam hastened to his old adversary, Jelowicki, and cried : “ Father Alexander,

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewics.*
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I sinned against you. Forgive me for the love of God." The two embraced each other, weeping.¹

Mickiewicz then obtained a private audience with Pius IX. It has been related that, on entering the Pope's presence, Adam said: "Behold the prodigal son." To which the Pontiff replied: "The most beloved son."² But what subsequently passed between them has never been known. That it was of a painful nature seems certain from the fact that Mickiewicz returned to his rooms in deep dejection, and that the Pope afterwards spoke of him with sorrowful compassion as "that poor man."³ Mickiewicz then made a general confession; and it is characteristic of that large-heartedness and generosity that never left him that it was to Jełowicki that he made this confession. At the same time, he fulfilled the condition of absolution by submitting the published course of his lectures and the writings of Towianski to the judgment of the Holy See.

The Poles in Rome were in a ferment of patriotic hopes. The war of 1848 seemed to open the road to Poland's deliverance. As so often in his history, Mickiewicz believed that the long worked for wish of his life would now be realised. He devoted himself to raising a Polish legion to start from Rome, the Polish ladies began to work a banner to be carried at its head,

¹ Father Smolikowski, *Relations of Adam Mickiewicz with the Fathers of the Resurrection*.

² Cyprian Norwid, *Readings on Julius Słowacki* (Polish), Warsaw, 1909.

³ Father P. Smolikowski, *Relations of Adam Mickiewicz with the Fathers of the Resurrection*.

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and it was resolved to enlist the Pope's sympathy with, and blessing on, the cause.¹ A little band of Poles, with Mickiewicz as their spokesman, waited on Pius IX. for this purpose.

It appeared to Mickiewicz as though he were now at last to see the granting of his dearest dream. As he and his companions stood in the ante-chamber, expecting the summons to their audience, Mickiewicz, in a state of passionate exaltation, flung himself at the feet of the Resurrectionist, Hube, begging his blessing, and calling upon the Fathers of the Congregation to unite their spirit to his during the coming interview. Hube and the rough ex-soldier Jelowicki here displayed the lamentable want of tenderness and tact which distinguished their dealings with that sick and suffering soul, and which had the result that Mickiewicz left Rome no nearer reconciliation with the Catholic Church than when he entered it.² They regarded his request as savouring of Towianism, and did not hesitate, for all the overstrain and want of mental balance which to their great apprehension they beheld at the moment in Mickiewicz, to add fuel to the flames by their rebuke. He entered the Pope's presence in a state of excitement that boded ill for the success of the mission.

¹ It is always so interesting to come across the impression that Mickiewicz made upon those who met him, that we must not pass over the words of a Polish lady in Rome at this time. She said that he was a man whose influence could save or damn millions of men. Listening to him, her horizon was widened, she saw further, understood more, and was raised higher. His words, said she, carried away the listener as on a torrent (L. Mickiewicz, *Mémorial de la Légion Polonaise de 1848*).

² J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

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Carried away by his feelings, he spoke of the new epoch of the spirit that was at hand in strains of such wild extravagance, in his fervour speaking so loud, while the other Poles present looked on in dismay, that the Pope was constrained to beg him to remember where he was, and to speak lower.¹ This unfortunate interview in itself illustrates the effects that long spiritual and mental strain had wrought upon Mickiewicz's tormented mind.

The success of the legion, that had begun under such unpromising auspices, was doomed from the first. Discord dogged the enterprise. Shortly after the Papal audience, the Poles in Rome met to organise the matter. While Mickiewicz spoke upon the subject of choosing a leader, it became apparent that his heart still clung to the mystic creed of his prophet. Reproached by one of the audience—a Towianist—for having submitted the teaching of the Master to the decision of Rome, Adam drew from his bosom a book containing Towianski's prophecies, and, declaring that he always carried them on his heart, he proceeded to read them aloud. Jełowicki stopped him, while others accused him of want of sincerity in his dealings with the Holy See. Mickiewicz defended himself by stating that, as long as the Church had not condemned Towianism, he was free to believe in it and to spread its doctrines. Mutual recriminations on all sides followed. It ended in twelve young Poles, mostly art students, proclaiming Mickiewicz as the head of the legion, and begging him to lead them to Lombardy.

¹ This scene has been very curiously dramatised by Wyspianski in *The Legion*.

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Mickiewicz did not easily part with any hope for his country, however unlikely it appeared ever to see the light. He prepared to lead forth his little band. It is pathetic to reflect that he, the unconquerable idealist, looked upon this handful of raw youths as the nucleus of a great Polish legion to save his nation, and that he seriously intended to conduct them to Poland through all the intervening countries, in the belief that adherents and sympathisers would join their banners from every city. Under this conviction he drew up a set of rules for their guidance, impregnated with that curious spiritualised patriotism, characteristic of Mickiewicz and many others among the Polish poets of his day, and which never permits us to forget that they looked upon themselves as pilgrims, chosen as another Israel journeying to a promised land. We realise with difficulty that these "Acts" were written in the nineteenth century and intended for soldiers. They seem to hail across the centuries from a mediæval crusade: but this impression of a holy war, of a man taking but little thought of a material world and always setting his face to things unseen, to an invisible goal, ever clings about the figure of Adam Mickiewicz.

The "Acts" set forth to the members of the Polish legion that, holding out hands of brotherhood to the other Slav nations, they were to return to their country with the latter's help. The Christian spirit is to be manifested by "free deeds"; God's word, as announced in the Gospels, is to become the law of nations, the law civil and social. The native land is the "field of life for God's word on

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earth." Mickiewicz urges these spiritual champions to hold out the hand of love and help to "Israel, the eldest brother"—Mickiewicz had a special predilection for the Jews, and spoke to them in their synagogues—and he insists upon equal rights for all, particularly including women. Poland was ever to hasten to the help of every oppressed Christian nation. Nor can he omit the great prophecy of Mesyanism, that Poland, rising in glory from the grave, will be the leader, the spiritual mistress of all Slavonia.¹

During this, the last time that he ever stayed in Rome, Mickiewicz renewed his acquaintance with the poet, Krasinski. They had met long ago in Switzerland, when Krasinski was little more than a boy entering a tragic life. Since then the latter had passed through a gulf of despair and pain, to emerge as the supreme mystic teacher of his people, as the poet who, out of the depths of his grief, ever pointed to a radiant dawn of hope and glory for his nation, to be attained only by purifying her moral character from every stain. He had watched with the deepest regret the fatal step taken by the great poet, whom the younger man admired with all his heart, although their relations had never been intimate. Both Mickiewicz and Krasinski were men whose hope for their country never waned. Both lived and toiled for Poland. Both were mystics. But the likeness ended there. Of the two, Mickiewicz had the stronger and higher character; but, for all the ethereal nature of his patriotic mysticism, Krasinski possessed a piercingly clear insight into the existing

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz. Count Stanislas Tarnowski, Study for the History of Polish Literature : Zygmunt Krasinski.*

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political conditions that was absolutely lacking to Mickiewicz.

Mickiewicz spent nearly every evening while in Rome in Krasinski's rooms. "Never," so Krasinski wrote to a friend, "have I beheld a soul held in a harder slavery." At first he spoke of the severity, the tyranny, he now saw in Adam's character, the result of Towianski's influence.¹ But, filled with admiration for Mickiewicz, despite all his wanderings, he added that he was :—

"Always the same, a soul remaining undestroyed by its suffering, a Titanic soul, a Prometheus chained to the rock whether of the nation's sorrows or of his own beliefs, but bearing in his bosom the fetters of his people."²

The two held endless talk. These conversations became a great strain upon Krasinski's mind. He spent hours in trying to convince Adam of the real nature of Towianski's tenets, while Adam still upheld that there was in them much that was admirable and salutary. Nor could he agree with Mickiewicz who, in a state of rapturous rejoicing, saw in the political events of 1848 the approaching resurrection of Poland. He attempted in vain to persuade Mickiewicz of the futility of his score of Polish youths whom he called a Polish legion, pointing out to him that no national rising could succeed without chiefs marked by their talents and heroism as leaders of men. For the love of Poland he implored Mickiewicz not to throw away

¹ Count Stanislas Tarnowski, *Study for the History of Polish Literature*: Zygmunt Krasinski.

² L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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or risk his own life, so precious to his people. On the eve of his departure from Rome at the head of his forlorn following, Mickiewicz came to bid Krasinski farewell. Once more he made a last effort to win him to his plans. Krasinski sadly refused, and, wishing him all happiness, begged him to sow love wherever he went, and never to foster a fratricidal hatred between sons of the same nation. They parted very affectionately, Adam embracing Krasinski with tears in his eyes.¹ They never met again.

Mickiewicz set out with his band. To follow his progress through Italy belongs to a political study and not to this book. It is enough to notice that, in the cities through which Mickiewicz passed on his road to Milan, he was greeted with that outburst of admiration that followed his gifts and still more his character throughout his life. The Italian Nationalists greeted him as a brother. At Florence, in Santa Croce, in the presence of the Italians and Poles gathered side by side, Rafael Lambruschini prayed aloud :—

“Lord! look upon this unhappy nation and other nations who suffer as she does. In these days of Thy mourning”—it was Lent—“give them consolation in their long mourning. In the day when Thou shalt rise again, the conqueror of death and evil, raise these nations from their graves where the godless laid them, crying: ‘Ye are dead for ever.’ Let them not be dead for ever! Let them be born again to newer and fairer life. Let triumph in them the power of

¹ Count Stanislas Tarnowski, *Zygmunt Krasinski*: and *Short Sketch of the Life and Writings of Zygmunt Krasinski* by Stanislas Małachowski, quoted by Count Stanislas Tarnowski, *op. cit.*

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Thy holy religion, the power of liberty and love.
Let that power free all nations and gather them in
one fold, under one shepherd."

To which Mickiewicz and all present replied,
Amen.¹

As, upon this occasion, Mickiewicz and his companions were entering the church, a young Franciscan friar ran down the steps of Santa Croce and, throwing himself into Mickiewicz's arms, was heard to greet him in a language unknown to the Italian bystanders. He was a Pole.² It is so rarely that we meet in the history of Mickiewicz any direct intercourse with our nation, that it is interesting to find that in Florence he made friends with an Englishwoman who had married a Polish artist. Struck and delighted with this lady's devotion to her husband's country, Mickiewicz gave her as a keepsake a religious miniature that he had never parted with since he left Lithuania, at the same time writing out these words for her in French :—

"In the epoch which we are entering, we must always remember these words of Our Lord : I have brought fire on the earth. I will that it should burn !

"Virtues without enthusiasm suffice for us and the world, but God demands of us that, in our feeling of love and devotion to Him, we should fulfil the same degree that we demand from our neighbour in our earthly relations.

"The death of those who are dear to us rather brings their persons nearer to us than it parts us from them.

"We cannot free ourselves from the sufferings of the

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*, and *Mémorial de la Légion Polonoise de 1848*.

² L. Mickiewicz, *Mémorial de la Légion Polonoise de 1848*.

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lower atmosphere otherwise than by raising ourselves to the higher atmosphere.

"Woe unto him who will not share the sufferings of millions, and woe especially unto him who will not share their joy or thank God that He has relieved the burden of life for millions of our fellow-men."¹

At Lodi, a student came forth and recited an Italian translation of Mickiewicz's *Ode to Youth*. So moved was the poet by this token of brotherhood that in a transport of joy he embraced the speaker. Mickiewicz was always a subject for admiration to the leaders of the Risorgimento. Cavour once said before the Italian Parliament that a nation that possessed a man like Mickiewicz as her son must be predestined to a high calling. Mazzini coveted a personal acquaintance with the Polish poet as an honour, and wrote imploring him for a meeting. But with Charles Albert Mickiewicz was unsuccessful. Going into his tent (the King was in the field against the Austrians), he attempted in vain to interest him in Poland. Then dissensions again broke out in the Polish legion; so Mickiewicz returned to Paris in July, 1848, with the intention of sending out a detachment of Parisian Poles to Italy. Again he failed; and the poet saw his hopes for his country dashed to the ground once more.

In Paris Mickiewicz found a fresh split in the

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*, and *Mémorial de la Légion Polonaise de 1848*. It will be noticed what stress Mickiewicz always lays on the term *feeling* in his spiritual advice and spiritual maxims. The above memorandum was written in the full flush of his new hopes for Poland, which no doubt explains the last sentence.

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Circle. Towianski was back there. Envious, as it would appear, of Mickiewicz's reception in Italy, he had been denouncing Adam's proceedings to the brotherhood. The result was that at least one of his fervent admirers began to perceive some decidedly human flaws in the prophet whom he had held for an angel, and consequently left him. The Revolution of July saw Towianski in prison, under the charge, unjust enough, of instigating the mob to the street fighting. With his customary generosity, Mickiewicz moved heaven and earth till the man who had treated him so unfairly was liberated. He was released, but banished again from France.¹ But he and Mickiewicz were never again to each other what they had once been. Mickiewicz acknowledged that Towianski was not the man chosen to bring about the new epoch, and he frankly owned the visionary's mistakes. The relations between them became sometimes strained, sometimes non-existent. Yet though Mickiewicz worked for his former master no more as he had once done, although his enthusiasm in the Cause had died for ever, the glamour Towianski had cast on him was not utterly destroyed. As late in his life as 1853, he, for the last time, publicly advocated Towianski.

¹ Another victim of the Revolution of July—Affre, the Archbishop of Paris—had at one time touched Adam's life. In the days of his first ardour in the cause of Towianism, Mickiewicz had had an interview with the Archbishop in which the poet, his soul on fire, had with considerable eloquence harangued the Archbishop on his duties as a pastor, and had spoken of a good shepherd giving his life for his sheep. Mickiewicz lived to see him die for his flock on the barricades (Father Smolikowski, *History of the Congregation of the Resurrection*).

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albeit coldly and vaguely, in a letter that he wrote to the third Napoleon. He had wandered too long in the darkness for his soul to be entirely delivered.

Seven years of Mickiewicz's suffering life after his return from Italy are still to run. It would be grateful to know that, as he sighted the harbour of eternity, the storms that had beset his journeying on earth died down. But it was not to be. His was the rugged pathway to the end.

Towards the close of 1848, a hope arose that the chair of Polish literature at Cracow would be given to Adam. He wrote to the friend acting in the affair that he accepted it, but, he said, "I see one difficulty. What will be the moral conditions imposed on me by those who are summoning me? Would to God that in those conditions there will be nothing to wound either my Christian or my patriotic conscience!"¹ He bids his correspondent enlighten him quickly on these points: but, as a matter of fact, the Austrian Government, then a bitter foe to Poland, intervened, and Mickiewicz never saw that Cracow where his remains now lie. His position in France became precarious. For a while, he lived in constant suspense lest, on account of his work in the *Tribune des Peuples*, he would be expelled from the country. He had once even to take refuge, disguised, in a friend's house. That danger blew over. But he and his family were sunk once more into desperate poverty. Every article that could realise a little money was sold, and in the bare, denuded house the

¹ Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letter to Wojciech Stattler, December 27th, 1848.

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poet and his wife and family of young children struggled with want. These children were used to look upon the difficulties of daily life with the tranquillity that they had learnt from their parents' examples. "We were brought up not to care for money," writes the eldest daughter: and she recalls that, throughout the well-nigh unceasing domestic trials that fell so hardly on the wife and mother, she had never heard one word of complaint from Celina's lips.¹

In bitter disappointment that the Revolution of July had not brought about the restoration of Poland, as he had expected, Mickiewicz wrote to Domeyko:—

"God's anger is always upon us and upon our country, and we have already lost the right to complain."²

"I have nothing good to tell you about the condition of our fellow-countrymen," he wrote to another Polish friend, and the weariness of old age and disappointed life sounds through his words. "Everywhere there is sadness and trouble and despair. This state of things will not last long: but for us even a few years is not a small time. Happy is he who can succeed in holding out through heavy years till better days."

"We struggle as best we can with so many miseries," he tells the same correspondent. "Our principle is to do our part and leave the rest to Providence. We are trying to go on living till better times."

"This year"—1849—"I have had more trouble

¹ M. Gorecka, *Recollections of Adam Mickiewicz.*

² L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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than usual. I have got through all that, and I hope that later on things will be easier."

Then, writing in 1851, he apologises to his friend for long silence, saying that he had nothing that was not painful to tell.

"This year has been a heavy one for all our colony of exiles. On all sides misery, lamentation and even despair. Even I, although in many respects better off, had, besides my usual troubles, new ones. But why should I write about that? In the journey which is heavy for all, it is not right to cast our burdens upon others' shoulders. . . . I hold out so far, and do not allow myself to sink."

"I am glad," writes the man whose simple faith in Providence the rudest shocks were powerless to shake, "that you are better, and I always sing the same tune to you and implore you to remember always that your health depends chiefly on yourself, on your inner life. The more you feel interiorly refreshed, the more full of life, the stronger, then the better will you be physically. But that inner life does not depend on many thoughts passing through your heart and on confusing yourself with different plans. We must always have one aim. For you this aim is to raise yourself to a *living faith* that everything that befalls us is for our good, that things will get better in this world, and that we must do our little part to help to bring about this better state. All our troubles and misery are given to us that we may conquer them. To fly from them avails nothing, it is the same as laying down arms, emigrating. Try to look upon every misfortune as a piece of business,

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and settle in the beginning upon the way in which you must act. In every such case the proof of victory will be if you feel calm of soul and even happy. Try, I beg of you, each day to begin from the morning to raise your thoughts and feeling above all difficulties, and give no rest to your heart and soul until you experience relief and consolation. That is the true arms and nourishment of the soldier. Then it is possible to act. But you will not experience relief and consolation otherwise than by steeping yourself in contrition. Remember that he who has lost *is always guilty*. If it does not go well with us, we ought to push forward, in so far as we are the causes ourselves of it not going well. Then, and only then, let us consider external circumstances. You, dear Madam, were born at a time and in a state of society which had no other aim except to journey through life as comfortably as possible. You were brought up to that. Having in your soul more life-giving feelings and the instinct of something higher, better, you started off and fell, you wandered. Every child when it tries to walk must first fall and be bewildered. Therefore we must not trouble too much over the past, but we absolutely must examine it continually to see where such and such a mistake came from, from what lack in ourselves or from what evil will. Such careful reflection, uniting us with the orderings of Providence, at once calms us and gives us strength at the same time. You will then forget about many little worries, as you will have this only as your aim, to help in some way to the common good, and if that is not granted to us, then, at least, to profit so well

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from life that we shall go out of the world with something better and higher. For after this life we shall be given such a country and a family as we shall have deserved. Let us make friends there betimes, and thence we shall draw strength to work here in our earthly country.

"As you see, I am writing to you what I have often spoken of, and the truth of which you have confessed. God grant that it may be a comfort to you."¹

Mickiewicz was presently given a small post as librarian. His work was wearisome and distasteful, but he uttered no complaint. With this slight increase of funds, the possessions that the family cared for most came back, and every Thursday evening saw the simple gatherings in the poet's house for tea and talk and the music which Mickiewicz had always so passionately loved. Among the guests of all races and all arts were the German painter, Overbeck, Lamennais, Michelet, Quinet, and many other well-known names. On these occasions a quartet party, with Stefan Zan as the 'cellist, played, and Michelet's daughter sang to Celina's accompaniment. One of the visitors was an old Polish man of letters, named Grzymała. That this gentleman was by this time of somewhat advanced years may be gathered from the fact that he had been a Professor when Adam was a student at the University of Wilna, and that when

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz. Letters to Madame Wodpol, October 28th, 1848; August 27th, 1849; 1849; September 6th, 1851; 1851.* This lady had been Madame Łubienska before her second marriage.

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the poet brought out his maiden book of poems *Grzymała*, as a man of standing, had passed judgment on them. It was, however, the foible of the old man to pose as being young. Another and far more objectionable weakness was his passion for reading aloud his own poetry, whether the audience cared to hear it or no. He would present himself at Mickiewicz's house with his pockets full of it ; and out it would come and inflict itself upon the company. At last, when the latter could bear it no longer, Adam would have recourse to a little stratagem. He would innocently ask *Grzymała* if it were he or some one of the same name who had taken part in the Great Diet of 1791 ; or whether it could possibly be true that he had figured in the battle of Austerlitz.

“Oh, Mr. Mickiewicz, for pity’s sake !” the old gentleman would cry in a great flurry. “Can you say such a thing and before the ladies too ?” and the poetry would at once disappear. Mickiewicz’s daughter notes that these inoffensive little jokes with an old bore were the only ones of the sort that Adam had ever been heard to allow himself. He detested any sort of pleasantry that could wound another, or anything in the nature of making game at the expense of his neighbour. Not only were his dealings with his friends and acquaintance conspicuous for their kindness and forbearance, but he strictly forbade his children even the most harmless jests concerning others.¹

During these gatherings in his house, the talk would run chiefly on politics—those politics from which Adam ever looked to see the liberty of his

¹ M. Gorecka, *Recollections of Adam Mickiewicz.*

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dearly-loved country rise—or upon mysticism. At such times, the dreamy, sad yet tranquil, countenance of the poet, with absent eyes that appeared scarcely to behold what was before them, would undergo a complete transformation. The soul, on fire behind its veil, shone through the tired face, and to the intent gaze of his eldest child it seemed as though a halo played about the silver hair. When he talked of far-off Lithuania; of her tales and legends that he had always loved; or of the long past days of his childhood and youth among her marshes and forests, his beautiful smile, now rarely beheld, would return to his lips. That smile was so sweet, so full of goodness, that his daughter says she never had seen its like on any other face; but it was only when he told the curious tales he had heard as a child—Mickiewicz was always fond of a good story—that he seemed for the moment to regain his lost youth.

His was ever the heart of the exile. Through the thirty years he had spent in a foreign land, he still clung to the old Polish traditions, he still led the life of a Pole. Whenever his house had any sort of garden, he planted a service-tree, for the reason that it transported him back to Lithuania; and its fruit pleased him because he had eaten it as a boy in his own country. The other trees in the little cramped town garden all died. Only the service-tree grew and thrived, and to the children's imaginations it seemed as if some gift had come to them from that fatherland of theirs that they had never seen. The youngest son, born to Mickiewicz in 1850, was baptized in water from the Niemen, the well-loved river of his native land that he

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had sung in *Konrad Wallenrod* and *Thaddeus*. The time-honoured national customs, the traditions marking every feast-day, were strictly kept up in his house. On Christmas Eve he saw to it that straw was strewn on the floor in memory of Christ's birth in a stable, and that the blessed wafer, to be broken by the head of the household, and then parted and shared by every member of the family, in token of good-will and harmony, was on the supper-table according to the Polish custom, still observed to this day. The traditional dishes to be eaten at the Christmas Eve supper, which is in Poland a sort of Agape, and is partaken of at the appearance of the first star in the sky, were always there, concocted with no little trouble by Celina. Outside the door the sound of the Polish Christmas carols would presently be heard, to which Mickiewicz, softly humming an accompaniment, listened, deeply moved, as though to the echoes of his untroubled childhood. He then opened the door, and the singers—his own friends come to present their good wishes to him on the day which was his birthday as well as the universal feast—came in. The party wound up the evening by dancing the Polish dances. In the polonaise, Mickiewicz himself always took a part, saying that there was no dance so beautiful, so dignified, or so suitable to every age. On Good Friday evenings the poet gathered his children around him to read them the Gospel and to sing with them the Polish hymns for the day. Easter Sunday, the feast kept in Poland with peculiar solemnity, was also celebrated in this exile's home. Throughout all Poland, from the richest house to the peasant's hut,

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the tables, specially prepared and specially decked, are spread with consecrated food and drink, and the blessed egg broken and eaten. Wherever he was, Mickiewicz never failed to break the egg with family and guests. He, indeed, ever held the conviction that each new Paschal moon would see him back in a redeemed Poland. In 1848, when at Bologna, he broke the egg with his Italian host for, as he firmly believed, the last time on alien soil.

"For how many years already," wrote Mickiewicz's son in 1877, "have we eaten our Easter feast with the tears of our exile, as Israel the *matyoth* of his Pasch. 'The next year in Jerusalem,' say the dispersed children of the people of God. 'The next year in Warsaw,' said we with a faith not less great."¹

One is tempted in these, the closing pages of the great Polish poet's life, to linger on those personal intimate touches recorded by his eldest daughter, and which bring us so close to that most winning and human personality. How, playing whist, although he was a good player, his alternative absent-mindedness, or his torrent of conversation on any topic that interested him, were the despair of those playing with him. How, absorbed, he would play at his favourite game of chess—that one distraction of his during his wife's first absence in the asylum—till far into the dawn. How, while he sat over his pipe and talk with his intimate friends, his daughter, making her entry to pour out the tea, would stand at the door, positively unable to see the tea-table through clouds of tobacco

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Mémorial de la Légion Polonaise de 1848.*

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smoke. When the wife and children went out to some evening party, the father would never fail to ask them at what hour they intended to return ; and at whatever time they came in they found him up, always waiting to see all his flock safe beneath his roof before going to bed. On one occasion, as the mother and daughter were starting for a party, Celina sent her child to show herself to her father in her evening dress. Adam never raised his eyes from his book while his young daughter stood, embarrassed, waiting. At last, in answer to his inquiry as to what she wanted of him, she faltered out that she had come that he might see her in her party dress. With his customary enmity to the little pomps and vanities of this world, Mickiewicz replied by an earnest homily on indifference to raiment.¹

This daughter, when still a child, read, enraptured, her father's *Thaddeus*. Mickiewicz sometimes made her recite certain of its passages to him ; but it was the only one of his poems that she ever heard him mention. Then the child teased him to let her read *The Ancestors* that she saw standing on his shelves ; but he would never consent. Reminded of that outburst of grief and despair, the poet was heard, in answer to her request, muttering to himself, "Ah, it were better for a man not to write of certain things."

Mickiewicz did not approve of learned women, but when this child was older he consented to teach her German. As they were once reading Goethe together, the pupil suddenly woke to the fact that her

¹ M. Gorecka, *Recollections of Adam Mickiewicz*, from which I have taken all these domestic anecdotes.

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father was improvising, translating, as he went, into Polish verse. No doubt amazed to hear him, for it was many, many years since he had been known to express himself in poetry, the young daughter cried out with astonishment. Recalled to himself, the flow of Adam's inspiration was checked, and, to her lasting regret, he closed the book. When he and his daughter were alone, he read her the *Iliad* in a Polish translation. Sometimes, in his admiration, he recited whole episodes by heart. Once, Hector's farewell to Andromache so moved him that his voice gave way and he could not speak. Even into teaching his children the simplest matters, he threw the whole earnestness of his great mind. They must have his best. In the evenings, he corrected his eldest son's Latin. Often, his daughter would hear him, an hour after the lesson had ended, calling to the boy from an upper room to change this or the other expression after all.

In these last years of Mickiewicz's life, he tried to return to the great gift that he had so long silenced. He had shaken off the spiritual fetters that had crushed him. The days when he had looked upon it as a sin to write were over. He planned a continuation of *Thaddeus*, on the theme of the Rising of 1830. But that never-realised project is one of the tragic silences of literature. When it came to composing the poem, Mickiewicz found that he could write no more. His inspiration had gone for ever.¹

¹ He wrote something, it is unknown what, in verse ; but as he burned it before leaving Paris for Constantinople, we do not know whether it was anything more than a mere fragment.

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Among all that he had lost, one gift was given him back from the shipwrecks of the past. The old friendship between him and Bohdan Zaleski was renewed. The rupture between them had never been of the irrevocable nature that had torn Mickiewicz and Stefan Witwicki apart. Even during Mickiewicz's first absorbing enthusiasm in the propagation of Towianism, he and Zaleski met each other from time to time — always to find a barrier between them. Zaleski spoke of his friend as changed, as strangely irritable. Once he wrote in joyous exultation to Domeyko, after Mickiewicz's experiences with Towianski in Zurich, that "Our beloved Adam has broken with Towianski." But again he writes :—

"Dear brother Żegota, we are sorrowful even to death. Adam, a genius radiant with the garland of God's grace, has become the sower of scandal. Terrible is his reckoning with God. We pray constantly for him here. The great God, the merciful God, will rescue Adam back to us to do penance and to be His own servant again."¹

But all the time, though they scarcely saw each other, although Mickiewicz would stay close to Bohdan without seeking him out, the two who still loved one another so deeply each yearned for his friend.² Then, as Mickiewicz began to return to his old self, they met more and more frequently. For a while, there was still a shadow between them that had been unknown in those happier years when they had worked and striven, side by side, for the same goal. But, by

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*.

² *Op. cit.*

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the end of Mickiewicz's life, they were once more like brothers as of old ; and Adam's death struck a blow to Zaleski's heart that it was long before time could soften.

The last year of Mickiewicz's mortal term saw him burdened with care and trouble. Around him his friends, those in whose sorrows he had sympathised, or whose lives he had guided, were dying fast. "Some," he wrote, "have left us for ever, others"—and by these he means those whose hopes and ideals were dead—"drag out funereal days no better than death."¹ Among those whom death took was his wife. Enduring and uncomplaining to the end, between the paroxysms of an agonising illness, she still struggled about the house, still devoting herself as best she could to her home duties, ministering to the comforts of her husband and children. In her last hours all the clouds that had risen between her and Adam rolled away.

"From the time that she heard from me that there was no hope of her life," wrote Mickiewicz, "she made all her household arrangements, she took leave of all her friends, exactly as though she were setting out on a journey."²

She died in his arms while he prayed aloud, her last words, as though speaking to some unseen presence, being, "Oh, take me now, take me."³

¹ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewicz*. This letter was written to "Eva," now married.

² *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz*. Letter to Madame Wodpol, May 18th, 1855.

³ M. Gorecka, *Recollections of Adam Mickiewicz*.

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Her picture shows a grave and sweet-faced woman, breathing out a Quaker-like serenity and composure.

She died in March, 1855. Within the year, Mickiewicz followed her to the grave. These last months of his life were radiant with a new hope—also his last. It seemed now that salvation for Poland was to arise from the East ; and Mickiewicz's whole heart and mind were absorbed in raising a Polish legion to fight with the French and English armies against Russia. Believing, as he had so often believed before, that Poland's resurrection was approaching, the fire and ardour of youth took possession of him ; he seemed to be young once more. He prepared to sail for Turkey. The last letter that he wrote in Paris, shortly before his departure, and the last that he sent to his own country, was written to Thomas Zan, the friend and leader of his youth. Zan, disappointed by life, his ideals shattered, had returned from exile to Wilna. In those troubled times, communication with Poland from the outer world was of no little difficulty ; and Adam did not know, when he penned these words, that he to whom he wrote them was already dead. The sickness, poverty and death of mutual friends are his themes, but, above all, the sorrows of Poland, disguised for the sake of safety under the term of "family affairs." This farewell letter, stamped with the deepest sadness, that was written to a dead man by one who was himself walking in the shadows of his own fast-nearing death, ends by the telling of the writer's dream that the dead Czeczot had often come to him, and the last time "as though

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he invited me to go to him." The sentence is underlined.¹

Mickiewicz had never feared death. He looked upon it merely as the transition from one state of existence to another. Whether, when he set out for the East, in September, he foresaw that he would never return, we do not know. He destroyed a quantity of his papers; and it was noticed that he was much moved as he bent down to kiss his golden-haired baby boy for the last time. But he started for Turkey, full of joy and unquenched hopes.

The Pole was no stranger in Turkey.² After the Hungarian Rising of 1849, bands of Poles, who had fought for Hungary, entered the Turkish army. Iskinder Pasha, Skinder Bey, Sadyk Pasha, who did brilliant military service for the Sultan, were all Poles, and were known as the Polish Pashas. But Mickiewicz's ideals for the new Polish legion were of a very different nature to theirs. The Poles were to be in Moslem Turkey the type of Christian soldiery. Their leader was to stand forth as the champion of Christian teaching. It was, in fact, with the spirit of a Crusader that Mickiewicz threw himself into this new enterprise.

Then to him who had tasted bitterness so often there was given one brief spell of joy before it ended

¹ *Correspondence of Adam Mickiewicz.* Letter to Thomas Zan, September 2nd, 1855.

² Turkey has never consented to acknowledge the partition of Poland. It is a curious detail that consequently she has no consulate in Russian Poland.

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in the crushing disappointment that broke his heart at last. From Stamboul, he went up to the Polish camp in Burgas. There an enthusiastic welcome greeted him, both from strangers who saw him for the first time, and from those who already knew him. For two weeks he lived in the tent of Sadyk Pasha, surrounded by scenes calculated to appeal alike to the imagination of the poet and to the aspirations of the patriot.

“The Orient and the West were mingled there,” writes Monsieur Sarrazin. “Sadyk lived surrounded by his colonels his officers, his Kozaks, his buffaloes, his greyhounds, his dromedaries. The chase and the *fantasia* followed the military exercises. They tried Turkish, Arabian and Circassian horses ; they rivalled each other by their brilliant vaulting. Patriarchal customs were kept ; all the officers sat at the same table. The old songs of war and love enlivened the meals, and on holidays the Cossack dances were danced to the rattling of spurs.

“From every part of Poland, Poles had come to enrol themselves under the national flag. Some had sold their lands, others had left their lives of ease, others their wives and children, for the sake of their country. In the morning, the voice of the Hetman resounded, calling to military exercises. The horsemen, with the *kotpak* on their heads, manœuvred in their great white cloaks, above which floated the crimson reflection of their banner. On Sunday, they heard Mass in the steppe, between two lakes, not far from the sea. Formed up in squares, the soldiers bowed their heads over their sabres. Above

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them, flights of pelicans crossed the sky. Silence reigned over the infinite plain. Cranes hopped at the foot of the altar.”¹

As, beneath an Eastern sun, Mickiewicz watched these scenes, the prayer of the Polish pilgrims that he had written long ago in the clamour of Paris must have re-echoed in his heart :—

“ God of Sobieski, God of Kościuszko, grant to us to pray again to Thee as prayed our fathers on the battlefield, with weapons in our hands, before an altar made of drums and cannons, beneath the canopy of our eagles and our flags.”

But even then he saw clearly the fatal discord that was rising among his countrymen to ruin the nation’s new opportunity. He returned to Constantinople. There he would linger, gazing long, in certain streets that he said reminded him of the Lithuanian towns of his boyhood. Soon he knew that his last hope for his nation was doomed to the same bitter downfall in which every other hope of his had ended. On the 19th of November, 1855, he wrote to one of the Polish leaders. Beginning with the words, “ Since my departure from Burgas, I have had no heart to speak to you,” he finishes that, under the proposed commandership of the legion, he saw no hope for his country. This was the last letter that he ever wrote ; the last testament of his broken heart.

Overwhelmed with sadness, weighed down by disappointment, he fell an easy prey to the Asiatic cholera that was ravaging the unhealthy by-ways of Constantinople. Worn out by the long struggle of

¹ Gabriel Sarrazin, *Les Grands Poètes Romantiques de la Pologne*.

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his life, he sank after a few hours. As he lay dying, his thoughts still wandered, and this time with a gleam of comfort, around the Polish legion, and he was heard murmuring as if to himself that, even had he known of the fate that awaited him, he would still have bent his steps to the East.¹ Through his rapid and deadly illness, his one anxiety was lest the devoted friends who were tending him should be stricken by the same complaint, his last faintly gasped-out message to his children that they should love one another always. With a Polish priest for whom he had sent as soon as his danger declared itself, and with those few friends by his side, he passed from the world where he had striven so nobly and suffered so deeply, on the 26th of November, 1855. He died three days before the twenty-fifth anniversary of the night that the Polish nation had risen for her freedom—that nation whom he had loved and laboured for without ceasing, for whom his life had been one long self-sacrifice, in whose service he had found his death.

“Adam has gone from among us,” wrote Krasinski to a friend; and his words may be taken as typical of the grief of a bereaved people. “At that news, my heart was broken.” And he tells how Mickiewicz was to the men of his generation the giver of life and strength and spiritual sustenance, the pillar at whose fall the whole edifice has trembled.²

¹ Mickiewicz had a peculiar horror of cholera. More than twenty years before his death he had a presentiment, on seeing a young soldier die of cholera, that the same fate would be his.

² Letter of Zygmunt Krasinski to Adam Sołtan, quoted by Count St. Tarnowski, *Zygmunt Krasinski*.

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His remains, escorted to the quay of Constantinople by a guard of honour of Polish soldiers, were taken back to Paris, and laid, as he had desired, with those of his dead wife in the Montmorency cemetery. The coffin was carried, amidst the tears of a nation, by a band of those Polish youths to whom Mickiewicz had been so generous and so revered a guide. Standing by the grave into which he cast some handfuls of Polish earth, Bohdan Zaleski delivered, in a funeral oration, his last tribute of affection to his beloved friend. "All his life," said Zaleski, "was one pilgrimage to the grave of his mother, his country, to breathe into her who was dead his own life, that she might rise again."¹

For nearly forty years the body of Poland's greatest poet lay, as he had lived, among aliens on foreign soil. Then, in 1890, his dust returned to that land for which all his life he had yearned in vain, and which, in the poem dearest to his heart, he had prayed so passionately that he might behold once more. In Cracow, the ancient capital of Poland, and the present centre of her national existence, rests, enshrined among his nation's glorious dead, all that is mortal of Adam Mickiewicz.²

In the world's history, writes Dr. Kallenbach, there may be greater poets than Mickiewicz, greater in intellect and in creative power; but there has risen as yet no other who could be for his people what

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

² Mickiewicz's memory is still green in Turkey. The street in which he died is called by his name, and there exists a Polish village christened Adampol after him.

THE END

Mickiewicz was and is to Poland.¹ He held up before his nation a grand ideal. He toiled to raise her to moral heights. "Love God and your country," was the refrain ever on his lips, and the principle on which he ruled his passage through this world. For Poland he sacrificed ease, comfort, happiness. Her sorrows were his sorrows, her grief drove joy from his heart and aged him before his time. In him those stricken by pain found one whose compassion and whose guidance gave them strength to live. Those who died in his arms regained at his words the spiritual peace that they had lost, and learnt from him to face death without fear.² He erred and wandered in strange paths that would have wrecked a soul less generous and less great. Disillusions, disappointments, cruel sufferings, were his daily bread. Unembittered by adversity, he rose from each crushing failure and from each heavy trial to hope and work again. His oft-repeated motto is, Let us do our best, let us do what in us lies, and leave the rest to Providence.³ Tested by the relentless teaching of a life of well-nigh unbroken tribulation, his devotion to sublime ideals was never shaken. A brilliant modern writer has said that man's worst capability is that of outliving his great ideas. Mickiewicz never paid that painful price for his soul's aspirations. Within the weary, broken-hearted man who died in exile and defeat gazing to the country that he might

¹ J. Kallenbach, *Adam Mickiewicz*.

² Such are the testimonies we find in the life of Mickiewicz, given by those whom he helped to live or die.

³ L. Mickiewicz, *Life of Adam Mickiewics*.

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not see, there burned the same pure flame as in the youth who, in the opening of his young manhood, had cried to his comrades to soar to the sun and spurn earth-creeping egotism. The most inspired poet of Poland, the founder of her great romantic school of song, he has invested the magnificent literature of his nation with an undying glory. But he lives in history, not only as the noble poet, the devoted patriot, but as one ever journeying, no matter what the sacrifice to himself, ever striving to lead his fellow-men, to the far peaks of the highest things of life.

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